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FINE CLAY

A NOVEL

BY

ISABEL C. CLARKE

AUTHOR OF "BY THE BLUE RIVER," "THE SECRET CITADEL,"
"PRISONERS' YEARS," "NOMAD SONGS," ETC.



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**AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED TO
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FINE CLAY

CHAPTER I

THROUGH long periods of comparative insolvency, consequent upon that inherent and unconquerable optimism generally held to be characteristic of the gambler's temperament, Major Pascoe had drifted like some rudderless but not altogether abandoned derelict from pension to pension, now in Brussels, anon in Bruges, even at more fortunate times as far afield as in Florence and Naples. Brighter intervals had found him in the less favored and more economical caravanserais of Nice, Mentone, and Monte Carlo—which latter place might even justly have been defined as the Mecca of his pious imaginings. But when there he would endeavor to ease his conscience with the reflection that the South was necessary for his health, which, though good and even remarkable considering the strain put upon it, was not particularly robust. His native land now seldom saw him, a fact which he tried to regret in more sentimental moments. Those of his family who still remained had been alienated first by his long residence as a youth in India, and partly it must be confessed for the very just reason that they entirely disapproved of him and

his mode of life. They had ceased to send him even coldly-worded invitations, and for some years of continuous ill-luck and pecuniary embarrassment Maxim Pascoe had been living in Boulogne, a reputedly inconsolable widower with his little girl Yolande.

He was a retired officer who had seen service on the Indian frontier. As a youth his prospects had been sufficiently fair, and for his education Eton and Sandhurst, with an interval between the two passed at an expensive crammer's, were responsible. For more than ten years he had thoroughly enjoyed his life in a regiment of native cavalry, and on his credit side must be mentioned one or two acts of considerable valor, known to his comrades, and perhaps even yet not altogether forgotten in the annals of certain desolate outposts of Empire, although they had never been mentioned in despatches nor crowned with official recognition.

It was while serving in India that he had met a wealthy globe-trotter, Mr. Raymond Chesson, and his daughter, Veronica. The daughter was very young, very pretty, and indulged beyond belief by her only surviving parent. She was unsophisticated, susceptible; Maxim Pascoe was experienced, attractive and popular. Tall, thin and graceful in a lean wiry greyhound way he spelt perfection in Veronica's eyes. She fell in love with him with all the heedlessness of seventeen. He tried to believe that his own feeling for her was, as he would have expressed it, but an *engouement*. Matrimony formed no part of his scheme of life. In affairs of the heart he had

shown himself not a little unscrupulous. Many hoped and believed that this was only one of Max's passing infatuations, when he was seen dancing attendance early and late upon the shy, sweet-looking girl, with her father's apparent approbation. It was felt, too, that perhaps eventually something less immature might clinch his destiny. Nevertheless, after ten days of unavailing resistance Captain Pascoe—as he was then—succumbed. He approached Mr. Chesson with a timidity that was curiously humble, and was received dubiously and not altogether with the open arms for which he had hoped. Mr. Chesson had perceived the direction in which matters were tending; he had questioned his daughter and elicited a tearful confession as to her feelings for the handsome soldier, and he had then not unjustifiably made a few inquiries as to the reputation and character of Max Pascoe. The result, while it did not wholly allay paternal misgivings, showed Maxim in not too unfavorable a light. Had Mr. Chesson possessed six daughters, instead of this solitary and cherished specimen, it is probable that his welcome would have been more cordial. But Captain Pascoe was honey-tongued, and the faintest hint of opposition made him violently obstinate. His determination to win Veronica was very forcibly set in front of Veronica's father. He went away, and Mr. Chesson then held a very solemn interview with his daughter. Even if he had wished to prevent the marriage this would have proved for him an irremediably false step. Veronica had not known her father for seventeen

years for nothing. She could have cajoled and coaxed him into letting her marry the greatest detrimental that ever stepped. Indeed, as it was he liked Maxim so much that very little persuasion on her part was necessary. She did not have to shed a single tear in order to win his consent. Her joy was so wonderful a thing that it made him feel quite young again merely to witness it. She had been afraid, she admitted, that Maxim could never care for any one so childish and ignorant.

Their troth was plighted, and thus the fortuitous meeting of these two persons at a rather remote hill-station crystallized suddenly into a permanent situation destined in the future to give rise to innumerable complications. The Pagans might well believe that at the tying of such a knot the three grim sisters gave vent to a cackle of laughter, loud enough to penetrate to the stage whereon their poor puppets moved and played with such unconscious happiness.

Almost before he could realize it Maxim Pascoe was standing before the altar of an incredibly dingy and impoverished Catholic church in the Hills, making enduring vows to Veronica Chesson, placing gold and silver in her palm, and slipping a gold ring newly blessed upon her absurdly small finger. She was *petite*, slim and graceful; the top of her head, crowned with orange blossoms, reached but midway between his elbow and shoulder. He felt as he looked down upon her then as if he had quite solemnly undertaken the guardianship of another man's child, and, indeed, there was good reason for this view of the

case. The ceremony, brief and stripped of all the externals of music and singing to which he was accustomed, nevertheless impressed him very profoundly. To his dying day he never forgot the tawdry appurtenances of that church, which had seemed to him then a little forlorn and pathetic in its obvious poverty. The badly-executed and cheap statue of Our Lady of Victories was rather gaudy in coloring; there was an almost comic presentment of St. Joseph and a repellent one of St. Francis Xavier, the patron of the little Mission. He had time to notice all these things, and yet he thought he had never once turned his eyes away from the radiant little figure beside him, clad in shining bridal array. She was devout and recollected; he felt that she was praying with passionate earnestness. He repeated the words after the priest with mechanical emphasis, and wondered a little at her composure.

People prophesied that he would certainly break her heart when the mutual infatuation was over. But Maxim Pascoe had not broken his little Veronica's heart. Even if he had attempted to do so—which he never did—he would have found that it was made of sterner stuff than his enemies supposed. Behind those quiet brown eyes there was much steadfastness of purpose; beneath that small and rather child-like form there was real grit. She taught him many things. He soon realized that she was not a child but a very loving and lovable woman. As in the days of their engagement she had stirred something that was chivalrous and tender in him,

so as his wife she evoked from him a passionate adoration. He made strange efforts to fit in with her ideal. Soon he was tortured by thoughts of the danger that awaited her. If she had lived the Boulogne pensions might never have known that debonair and rather dissipated-looking figure. But she lived only long enough to hold her baby in her feeble arms, and to know that it had been baptized Yolande Mary Veronica by the same priest who had married them not a year before. She received the last rites of the Church with a tranquillity that bewildered Maxim. Then turning to her husband she spoke words of unimagined tenderness, committing her baby to his care with instructions that he never forgot. And that same night she died.

Thus again he found himself the rather unlikely guardian of a child, this time his own, a wee white mite of a thing with big brown eyes and hair like black floss silk wandering in loose rings about that miniature brow which so curiously resembled Veronica's. He was too simple a man to indulge in any morbid thoughts towards the baby for whom the mother's frail life had been spent. He could always answer to the call of duty; in moments of stress he was seldom found wanting. And all that he could do for his wife now was to care for her child. He made many, many vows kneeling beside Veronica's coffin, during the few hours that elapsed before it was taken away with the cruel swiftness so necessary in the East. He told those death-dulled ears again and again that the child of their love should be brought up in the Catholic faith. . . . He

wished passionately then that he had himself belonged to that faith, so that he might have carried out his promises with even greater exactitude.

Thus his married life had been curiously episodic, and few people knew the poignant history that was written so deeply, so unforgettably upon his heart. During those few months of their union he had learned to depend wholly upon Veronica, and her death gave him a sense of forlorn helplessness, but contrary to expectation he showed no disposition to repeat the experience of matrimony. He told himself that he could never love again as he had loved Veronica. Leaving the baby and her ayah with some friends in Bombay he volunteered for service on the frontier. He wooed death recklessly at the cannon's mouth, and learned how that grim god disdains the proffered gift. But he received a bad wound in his foot and was invalided home a few months later.

It was at this point that things began to "pan out badly" as he would have expressed it. First came the Chesson failure, pricking the bubble of that large Stock Exchange fortune, and incidentally killing Mr. Chesson, whose health had already been hopelessly shattered by the news of his darling's death. All Veronica's fortune was lost in the crash, for Mr. Chesson, doubting his son-in-law's business capacity and prudence, had made no settlements, preferring to give the young couple a large allowance which he had continued after his daughter's death. Maxim suddenly found himself in grievous pecuniary difficulties. His own debts had been accumulating

since Sandhurst days; he had always lived extravagantly, and he had run through practically all his own money. He sent in his papers, virtuously resolving to adopt a more lucrative profession than that of arms. His health prevented him from immediately executing this program, and before his foot had healed he had already drifted into that nomadic continental life, which is invariably demoralizing from its idle aimlessness, and was particularly bad for a man of Maxim's temperament.

His sister, Mrs. Jardine, had offered to take Yolande and educate her with her own children. This was met by a rather curt and haughty refusal. Intemperate letters passed between them. This was the beginning of that permanent coolness which existed always between Major Pascoe and his own family. They had come to the conclusion that he was by no means the proper guardian for a little girl, and, indeed, they had some justification for their opinion. Mrs. Jardine had wished to remove Yolande from her father's environment. "And I should have thought Max would have been only too thankful to get rid of the responsibility," she added indignantly when discussing the matter with her husband.

But Maxim had not given a second consideration to the proposal. If one judged him by a high standard of prudence and reliability he would without doubt have proved most lamentably wanting. He was not an ideal guardian for any child, and he was not at all accustomed to

children and had no great natural love for them as so many men have. But he possessed certain qualities, and to his own code of honor he adhered undeviatingly and rigidly. Those promises he had made to Veronica long ago in India before their marriage, which he had reiterated between his sobs as he knelt beside her coffin, he carried out with a fine scrupulousness. No Catholic devotee could have done more than he did in regard to the bringing up of Yolande in her mother's faith. His own faith was, it must be confessed, a trifle sketchy. He believed in doing one's duty, in playing the game, in keeping one's word, and he held a vague though consoling belief that some day he should see Veronica again, immortally young, eternally beautiful, radiant in shining white raiment as when she had stood beside him as a little bride in the dull gloom of that church with its heavy atmosphere of spent incense. And he had a conviction that when they did thus meet she would demand of him an account of his stewardship. She had trusted him, and he was not going back upon his word. It would have been following the line of least resistance to send the child to Mrs. Jardine, and his motive for refusing her offer would still further have incensed her had she been aware of it. Besides religion was a good thing for a girl to have. Had he not seen its abiding effects in that last gallant hour, when, fortified by the rites of Holy Church, Veronica's brave sweet spirit had left its fragile prison-house of clay? Whatever else, therefore, he did or left undone, however indifferently he kept that square allotted

to him by destiny, Major Pascoe was careful to see that all those who were successively entrusted with his daughter's upbringing and education were not only Catholics, but devout and practising ones. In emergency he would consult a priest, the Superior of a Convent, and other authorities of the kind, in order to find a suitable nurse or governess for Yolande. Indeed, he showed so much solicitude on the subject that he had several times raised high hopes in pious minds as to the possibility of his own conversion. But Maxim invariably disappointed those who desired his salvation, as in the past he had disappointed those who had felt that they could minister to his happiness, and, after his wife's death, to his consolation. If Veronica had lived he might have desired this saving grace. But he had had a succession of crushing blows, and they had made him a little reckless. The death of his wife, the loss of fortune, the wound which had compelled him to retire before his term of service was complete, had in their turn deprived Maxim Pascoe of powerful aids in the battle of life. Things were going from bad to worse with him when help appeared upon the scene in the unlikely guise of Miss Susan Tibbit.

CHAPTER II

MISS TIBBIT had never been beautiful, and now she had grown stout, and this was perhaps even less becoming to her than the gaunt and angular thinness of her girlhood. She was of middle height, and had a rather square, large face with a sallow complexion, beady eyes of nondescript darkness, a blunt nose, and scanty grayish hair. But beneath this unhandsome exterior she possessed a heart of gold, and so much British pluck and honesty that her acquaintances readily forgot the abrupt lack of suavity and polish in her speech and manner. A continuous conflict against poverty and the perpetual experience of treading strangers' stairs and of eating the bread of dependence—commonly supposed to be productive of much bitterness—had roughened a nature that was not already perhaps too smooth. Plain of speech as of face, the rôle of governess which she had adopted at the age of eighteen had made her more than a little inclined to be dictatorial. The habit of perpetual fault-finding and of remonstrance, the struggle for supremacy over successions of unruly children, had deprived her of any feminine charm she might once have possessed. British in type, with the thick figure, the tasteless if well-fitting garments, the large feet encased in strong boots so invariably portrayed in the impertinent Gallic

caricatures of her countrywomen, Miss Tibbit was apt at first sight to engender feelings of repulsion, if not of actual alarm, in the hearts of her beholders. You could at a glance determine her nationality, her character, and her calling.

Like Major Pascoe, she lived in Boulogne for reasons of economy; but, unlike him, the Casino supplied for her no secondary motive. Any form of gambling was abhorrent to her. Her conversion to Catholicism had not changed a conscience that was sturdily nonconformist. She eked out a small annuity—the legacy of a devoted pupil who had forgotten her severity, and remembered only her unchanging fidelity—by giving English lessons. Yolande Pascoe, with her dark hair and beautiful eyes, was well known by sight at least to the English colony at Boulogne, although she seldom mixed with other children. It would be perhaps too much to say that Miss Tibbit had taken a fancy to Yolande, but she had felt for a long time extremely sorry for her. Nor would her compassion, if closely analyzed, have proved altogether complimentary to Major Pascoe. For some months past Susan Tibbit had had her eye on the two; had noticed the frequency with which nurse or governess came and went, and had wondered as to the reason. One of them, however, whom she knew slightly, explained the matter to her. The salary was irregularly paid; sometimes it was not even forthcoming at all. It was swallowed up in the insatiable maw of the Casino. And this was a world where one could not afford to be generous. M. Pascoe was charming, and his little girl

was *très sage, très sérieuse*, and gave no trouble . . . but one could not live without money.

One summer Yolande's governess fell ill and was removed to a clinique. Maxim Pascoe felt, as he expressed it, stranded. For almost a week he did not once hazard his luck at *petits chevaux*. He occupied himself entirely with Yolande, who was then about ten years old. He took her for walks, heard her read and repeat her catechism, gave her dictations, and accompanied her to Mass at the Cathedral on Sundays. It was a part that did not fit the poor man well, and he was further discouraged by the feeling that Yolande was aware of this, and was dutifully trying to hide the fact from him. The two had just settled down to the morning lessons in the quiet little sitting-room overlooking the harbor, when a knock was heard at the door, and the Swiss waiter announced: "Mees Teebeet."

A large rather breathless figure approached him with something of the unwieldy action of a ship in a stiff gale.

Maxim rose to greet the new-comer, and bestowed upon her his best bow, which had now insensibly acquired, as the result of environment, a hint of Gallic gallantry.

His smile was still irresistible; his blue eyes, which ladies sometimes called "wicked," had retained much of their brilliance and charm.

"Good morning, madame," he said, and if he felt any surprise at the intrusion he did not betray it.

Miss Tibbit wasted no time in coming to the point.

"I heard," she said, "that your little girl's governess was ill. So I came to offer to take her place. I've brought my references, and if you want to know anything more about me M. le Curé and Marquise de Solignac will answer any questions. They've both known me for ten years."

Major Pascoe looked at her dubiously. He was by no means prepossessed by this blunt attack. But he was weary of playing the devoted parent, of teaching the young idea—even for one short week—to shoot; things for which he sorrowfully admitted he was both inadequate and incompetent.

"It was very kind of you to come, Miss . . . Miss . . ."

He was afraid to hazard the name presented to him in such mutilated Helvetian fashion.

"Tibbit," she said, "Susan Tibbit." From a letter-case of shabby, but solid brown leather she produced some documents, and presented them to Maxim Pascoe, who, from sheer embarrassment, accepted them, and glanced perfunctorily at their contents. One and all were eulogistic. "Thoroughly competent to teach French, German, Latin, Greek, and the usual English subjects, with the rudiments of music and drawing." "An excellent governess for preparing boys for their first school." "Has grounded my three sons in Latin, Greek, algebra, and Euclid," proclaimed another. "A thorough disciplinarian, unusually successful with spoilt and refractory children." At this the Major halted and smiled. He glanced at the neat little dark head of his

daughter, studiously bent above her book, and then pointed with a whimsical expression to the last of these testimonials.

"But what an ominous recommendation, Miss Tibbit," he said.

"That reference is twelve years old—it isn't much use to me now," she admitted rather reluctantly; "but in those days children were taught to obey." Her answering smile was a little grim.

"I'm afraid," he said, restoring the case to its owner, "that you are altogether too clever and too experienced. I mean Yolande is only ten, and she has never been refractory. And I simply couldn't afford to give you what your merits and attainments deserve."

Her odd look of undisturbed determination silenced him.

"You can give me," she said, "just what you like. I've known your little girl by sight for some time past, and I have set my heart on teaching her."

Major Pascoe was a man of impulse. Had he not become engaged to Veronica after ten days' acquaintance? Had he not subsequently married her with all possible celerity? But advancing years often diminish a natural instinct to follow the dictates of impulse, and urge the superior claims of reason and experience. He hesitated. She saw her advantage.

"At any rate, you might give me . . . a trial . . ." she suggested almost humbly. "And if you found afterwards that I didn't suit . . ."

She glanced at Yolande, who did not stir from

her seat by the window, although now she had taken her eyes from her book, and was looking out across the Quai Gambetta upon the busy harbor. Far off she could see, across the divided blue, a glimmer of white cliffs touched to gold and lying as if asleep in the sunshine. She wove childish dreams about this England which she always visualized as a place of white cliffs, austere and uncompromisingly perpendicular, alternately bathed in sunlight or draped with cold and drifting mists under a low gray sky. But on certain days that unknown shore looked so close that she felt she could almost have thrown a stone across the slender strip of blue sea. And young as she was, she had an impression that England would some day hold something for her—a treasure of whose worth and nature she could hazard no guess; it lay swallowed up in the obscurity of those drifting cold mists. When the time came, she would cross the sea and touch it with her hands. . . . Perhaps she would go in a steamer with her father. There was one leaving the harbor now, churning a path of white foam in its wake. The long scarf of filmy black gauze that emerged from its funnel melted swiftly into the radiant blue of the August sky. Yolande thought, however, that she should prefer to make that momentous voyage to England in one of the fishing-boats. They were infinitely more mysterious and romantic than the steamers that plied to and fro daily. She liked to see them sailing out with their heavy red brown sails proudly unfurled; she liked best, however, to watch their return, laden with the harvest of the sea, when the

quays were heaped up with all kinds of fish, silver-gray and shining white, and pink and red. Then if you got near enough you could see how weather-beaten were those masts and decks, how stained the huge sails, mute evidence to their stormy voyaging, their perilous adventures on days and nights of fierce gales. Those were the times when the white-coifed women stole up to the Calvary on the cliff, or to the shrine of Our Lady of Boulogne, and prayed for their men who were out on those raging waters. That mysterious statue, of which only the replica now remains, was an object of the most passionate interest to Yolande. She liked to think of that strange barque journeying from some unknown port, aglow with bright mystical light, coming without oars or sails or rudder across that very sea many hundreds of years ago. And sometimes the child would creep out of bed in the silence of the night, and look out of her window into the darkness pricked by the wandering lights of the fishing craft, half hoping that she might see a mysterious barque coming into the port, carrying on its deck a statue of Our Lady holding the Child in her arms, surrounded by vivid unearthly light and watched by adoring angels. . . .

On the quays, shining in the hot sunlight, groups of people could be seen loitering or hurrying as occasion demanded; the fishermen in their brown jerseys, the porters in their blue blouses, the passengers making their way towards the trains that were drawn up in long black lines. The trains were only a degree less inter-

esting to Yolande than the ships. She tried to picture their swift journeying, often in the darkness, across France and into those strange and beautiful countries that lay beyond France; the wild white world of the Alps splendid with their imperishable crowns of snow, the somber Apennines, the beautiful shining cities and wonderful vine-clad hills and plains of Italy; the sunny ports, where yet other ships went forth to other worlds of lonely scorched deserts and strange aged cities that had once been powerful and now lay asleep, forgetful of their past grandeur. . . .

Her father's voice broke abruptly across her world of dreams, and brought her sharply back to the little room in the Pension Constantine.

"Well, Miss Tibbit," he said, "I have certainly felt these last few days that a man isn't quite the right person to educate a little girl. Now if Yolande had been a boy . . . Not that I ever wished for a son," he added hastily, for indeed to have been compelled to pose permanently as an example would, he felt, have inflicted too cruel a strain upon him. "It isn't really a question either of shirking responsibility—it is a consciousness of one's own limitations. I don't know in the least if she is having the right kind of things to eat! You can give a priest's reference, I think you said? I'm not a Catholic myself, but my little girl is, and I never engage any one for her without first assuring myself that they are practising Catholics!"

All that was fiercely British illuminated her countenance.

"If any one else were to ask me such a question

I should regard it as an insult, Major Pascoe!" she said, with considerable hauteur.

"Ah, but you mustn't be offended," he said, smiling; "you see . . . her mother . . . I promised . . . Not being one myself makes me additionally careful. . . ."

It was at this point that their attitude towards each other insensibly softened. He began to regard Miss Tibbit with admiration not wholly, however, unmixed with awe, and in the years that followed, his more intimate knowledge of her only served to deepen, but never to change, the sentiments she inspired at their first interview.

She was, in her turn, mollified by a speech, which appeared to her to contain so much that was praiseworthy and admirable; and she began to feel an unwilling respect for this man, of whom she knew so little that could be counted to his advantage.

"You're quite right to be careful," she snapped: "but if you entrust Yolande to me, I'll see that she's brought up a good Catholic."

"But then the salary . . ." It was his last line of defense, and he felt convinced that she would speedily demolish this also. "I can give so little. And I'm afraid I can't afford to give more. You see, I live here because it's cheap. . . ."

"So do I," said Susan Tibbit.

Major Pascoe felt as if this determined lady were about to engage him in some paid capacity; he almost forgot that she was successfully suing him for a situation for herself.

"I must live somewhere," she went on; "this

pension is as good as any at the price—I know them nearly all. I'll move here and take a room, and I'll look after Yolande. In the evenings, when she's in bed, I can give English lessons. And I tell you frankly that I can't command the salary I used to. I'm too old and I haven't any certificates. People want young governesses. High-school girls—Girton girls—things that were never heard of in my time. But I'm not a bad teacher for all that—I've been too long at the business not to know it in and out!"

At this point Yolande slid from her seat. She had heard all the latter part of the conversation, and now realized that her own fate was hanging in the balance. A childish impulse to intervene seized her. She approached her father smiling. Although they had never been intimate she adored him. He was always kind to her; he had never scolded her nor punished her; he was never irritable nor impatient with her. He had given her the inestimable boon of a tranquil and happy childhood. He had given her yet other things whose importance she could not now measure. If she had missed her mother's temporal heritage, she had been at least assured of her spiritual one.

She looked from one to the other.

"Please let Miss Tibbit stay, papa," she said.

Susan Tibbit reddened. Children did not always take to her; often they were slow to discern the real kindness, the staunch goodness that lay behind her harsh and severe aspect. This spontaneous speech delighted her. She was silent, waiting for Major Pascoe to give his final decision.

But he, poor man, had now completely lost control of the situation. The position had been rushed, and he had had no time to secure his defenses. Yolande had abruptly cut off his last line of retreat. It seemed to him that victory already lay in those large and capable hands which had now drawn his child close to the ample form. Before the interview was over he had engaged Miss Tibbit, or would it perhaps be more correct to say that she had engaged him and Yolande? That same night her modest trunks and possessions were removed to the Pension Constantine, which overlooked the harbor, and was also so fatally, so perilously close, to the Casino, whither Maxim Pascoe betook himself that evening with the gay carelessness of a released school-boy. It was obvious from Miss Tibbit's determined and competent manner that she had come to stay, and not only to stay, but to rule. She assumed command, but it was a command mitigated by a new suavity as circumstances seemed to suggest. Yolande was a willing subject; she was invariably docile, and Miss Tibbit had inspired her with trust. The austere Englishwoman gathered this motherless one in her arms, and Major Pascoe, witnessing their good-night embrace, felt satisfied that she would guard his child, and that if anything should happen to him, she would continue to bestow upon her a protective and vigilant care, sheltering with her large and imposing person this small morsel of humanity from the onslaughts of any sudden storm.

When he had his next heart attack he made a

new will, appointing Miss Tibbit the sole guardian of his only child.

And if the Three Sisters laughed their grim laugh at this new development, no echo of their ghastly merriment reached him to disturb his peace of mind. He had found an efficient governess for Yolande, and was free to go his own way without let or hindrance. And that way led him down the long white boulevard to the Casino near the sea.

CHAPTER III

MAJOR PASCOE's heart-attacks were but transitory afflictions. In less than a week he was back playing *petits chevaux* with an ardor stimulated by that brief period of privation. Fortune seemed to smile upon him as never before.

He felt singularly happy with regard to his daughter. Miss Tibbit was, he felt sure, a wise and kind custodian, who would make up for all his own deficiencies. He had not lost his ability for the right discernment of spirits. Veronica and Miss Tibbit remained the two shining examples of his *flair*. He had a rather superstitious feeling that in the matter of Yolande's upbringing Veronica was guiding him, in some unimaginable manner, from unseen starry spheres. That presence, so quiet, so gentle, so unobtrusive, withal so loving, seemed to be eternally with him. Death could not rupture the cord that bound them. . . . He who had been called faithless remained faithful. He who had been known as fickle showed a peculiar changelessness. Perhaps Veronica's estimate of him, across the glamour of a young girl's first adoring love, had been a less mistaken one than people supposed.

Often on Sundays he would accompany Yolande and Miss Tibbit up the steep hill of pilgrim-

age to the great Cathedral, whose dome seems to dominate the town. Those were the days when the convents that lay so securely in the old town, within the strong ramparts, had not suffered from destructive hands nor become places of ruined cloister and empty sanctuary. October had just set in, and the beech and chestnut trees that lined the boulevard with twin avenues were a glory of gold, so bright that from afar they seemed to have almost the appearance of gaily blossoming flowers. And when Mass was over, Yolande loved to go with him round the somber gray ramparts, and look at the distant harbor on the one side and the shining valley of the Liane on the other, with the faint green hills outlined vaguely against the sky. Sometimes, too, on market days he could be persuaded to go with her to the Place D'Alton and buy for a few sous the great bunches of roses or chrysanthemums, pink and crimson, and golden and white. All the little world of Boulogne seemed to gather there to buy flowers or vegetables. Yolande had a passion for flowers, especially the sweet-scented ones, roses, violets, carnations and lilies. And when things were going pretty well, her father liked to see her happy face as she grasped the big bunches in her tiny arms. Yolande, as she grew older, knew when things were going well and when badly, with the curious instinctive knowledge of a child. She knew it, too, by the manner of the people in the pension. There were times when they were all most indubitably in disgrace. This was a feeling that hurt and wounded Yolande. It made Miss Tib-

bit assume a sternly defensive attitude. She had a way of "dealing" with situations which Major Pascoe admired. He could not do that sort of thing himself; he was always smiling, debonair, full of promises, deaf and blind to half-veiled impertinences. He, the chief aggressor, suffered least, and it must be said that he had no idea that his child's sensitive nature was outraged by the situation he had himself created. A run of luck . . . and all would be well. Miss Tibbit took advantage of any temporary prosperity and laid violent hands upon his wealth. She paid bills and spent the rest in a wise way, for she knew that if she did not it would inevitably find its way back to that insatiable maw.

"Is there anything left, Miss Tibbit?" he would inquire with simulated carelessness.

"I'm afraid not. You see, I had to pay all those bills. People were becoming importunate."

He sighed. "They might have waited a little longer, mightn't they? However, I suppose you were right. My luck never lasts long."

She was aware by this time of the sinister fact.

"I should like to see you give up the Casino," she said. "Surely you could live quietly on what you have?"

"What—on my pension?" he inquired, aghast at the suggestion.

"I could arrange the budget," she said tranquilly. "And it would be at least more decent. And with a little management . . ."

He shook his head.

"Couldn't do it," he said. "And the place

shuts next week. I shall go to Monte soon. I can leave Yolande with you and feel quite happy about her."

This became a yearly habit. He went south, as he expressed it, with the swallows, returning in the later spring when the avenues were bright with emerald verdure, and the Channel was almost as blue on fine days as the Mediterranean he had left with such regret. Still, it was cheaper in Boulogne, and he could not altogether desert his child. She was growing up rapidly, and was tall for her age and straight and slim as a dart. She was nearly as pretty as Veronica—he would never acknowledge that she was really prettier than her mother had ever been. Four years of uninterrupted sway had crystallized Miss Tibbit's position in the family into one of apparently complete permanency. It was not to be imagined that anything short of death would remove her. And she, too, saw that the child was growing up, and that she was going to be not only beautiful, but arrestingly beautiful. This knowledge filled her with something akin to dismay. She loved Yolande as she had never loved any one before in all her life. She indulged her as it would have seemed impossible in the old days that she could have indulged any one. The child had softened her. She was much less austere, much less harsh. She had even learned in those years to make due allowance for her employer. She forgave him many things, and he made singular demands upon her forbearance. Her salary, though meager, was not always forthcoming. She never mentioned those ar-

rears which he so conveniently forgot. The "little horses" often claimed also what was the just due of Monsieur le Propriétaire. The Pension Constantine had been exchanged for a yet dingier one. Nevertheless, she had accompanied her charge there without a murmur. Out of her own slender means she had from time to time renewed Yolande's worn-out shoes. She mended and darned, and darned and mended again, till her eyes were so tired she could scarcely see. The woman adjudged competent to teach French and German and the usual English subjects with the rudiments of music and painting, and to ground boys thoroughly in Latin, Greek, algebra and Euclid, spent her time voluntarily in these small and dreary activities. She loved Yolande, and she forgave Yolande's father.

"It is a pity you're not a Catholic yourself, Major," she said to him one day.

"Why do you say that, Tibby?" he inquired. (He had picked up this mode of address from Yolande.)

"You want a rudder," she replied calmly.

"I've got a rudder, thank you," he said.

But Miss Tibbet did not speak idly. And she had dealt in her time with too many rude and rough schoolboys to fear greatly what any one might say to her. She was always blunt and fearless.

"Is it going to bring your ship into harbor?" she said.

"Don't know about that," he said, throwing down the *New York Herald* and looking at her with a most engaging smile.

Even now his smile had considerable charm, and his eyes were scarcely less blue than when Veronica had fallen in love with them.

"Now if you'd the faith," she went on, "you would see—just how necessary it is to make the harbor!"

"I wish you would kindly remember that I'm fifty and quite incorrigible," he said; "but I've seen about Yolande having the rudder all right. Won't that count to me for merit?"

He had too much knowledge of the Church not to speak her language with some ease.

"Faith is necessary—as well as works," she said sternly.

He went back to his paper, and she did not say anything more, but prayed that her words might "sink in" to that not altogether abandoned heart. It was for Yolande's sake that she so eagerly desired his reformation. As a parent he seemed to her to represent all that was impossible and detrimental.

It cannot be denied that Miss Tibbit had acquired in the course of years a certain influence over her employer. It was not strong enough to win him from the absorbing if precarious delights of the "little horses," nor to prevent him from absenting himself during the long winter months at Monte Carlo. The very fact of her presence enabled him to do this; always before he had been afraid to leave Yolande, and he did not like the prospect of taking the child with him. Miss Tibbit's devotion to Yolande was now an established fact. She was a little ashamed—she who had lived so apart from all

love and tenderness—that thus late in life her heart should be so deeply touched by the daughter of another woman. Although she had not been lacking in affection for the children with whom she had been in the past associated, she had never profoundly loved any of them. She had always been the governess, scolding, rebuking, punishing. But Yolande Pascoe never received from Miss Tibbit anything but the most indulgent tenderness. The child was very quickly responsive to love as solitary children often are. And she loved “Tibby” very dearly. She had not a secret in the world from her. Even those childish dreams had been recounted to Tibby’s sympathetic ears. Tibby knew how Yolande had stood at the window in the old days at Pension Constantine, hoping to see another barque approach the harbor lit by a sheet of mystical flame, bearing yet another miraculous statue of Our Lady from some unknown and unimagined port, guided by the Blessed Virgin herself. . . .

The dreams were less absorbing now. Yolande was fourteen, tall and grave-looking for her years. There was very little of the child about her except her curious innocence. In her speech there was a very slight foreign accent, and she spoke French quite as easily and fluently as she did English. She had never been to England since she first arrived home from India as a baby, and the distant white cliffs still spelt romance and the unknown to her. If she felt her father’s protracted absences, often lasting for six months at a time, she never complained; and the life she lived with Tibby in a little *pension* within the

ramparts, in one of those tiny, narrow, crooked, old-world streets, if not exciting, was at least a tranquilly happy one. She had no companions of her own age. Her days were quite monotonously uneventful. In the early morning she accompanied Tibby to Mass in the Cathedral, which was so close to their present abode, and on their return they partook of their coffee and rolls in the dingy little *salle-à-manger*. Lessons occupied the next three hours, and were relinquished only at the hour of the mid-day *déjeuner*. After this meal they went for a walk, generally down to the shore, for Yolande loved the sea in all its moods. Then more lessons, a little visit to the Cathedral before dinner, an hour of quiet reading or working when that meal was over, and then bed-time.

Rumor reached Miss Tibbit that Major Pascoe had passed a very successful winter, and was living like a prince at Cannes. Princely, too, were the cheques he duly posted to Miss Tibbit every Monday morning; they more than sufficed for the expenses of that quiet and cheap little *pension* whither she had moved immediately after Major Pascoe's departure for the Midi. Prudently she began to put by a little nest-egg for Yolande. The rainy day was sure to come when hard-hearted creditors might force the Major to seek refuge in even dimmer and cheaper *pensions*. Still, the sunshine lasted quite unaccountably all through the winter, and Miss Tibbit committed small extravagances by making a whole new outfit for Yolande. She could work like a Frenchwoman, and the child's lingerie was so delicate,

it would not have disgraced a princess. She worked her fingers nearly to the bone. When the Major returned in June he was struck by the dainty charm of Yolande in her new and pretty summer frocks, the skirts of which were now almost long. She was already past his shoulder, straight, slim, slender, carrying her small dark head gracefully. Under her wide straw hat little dark curls, soft as silk, clustered against her white brow. But her hair was always neat, and Tibby continued to tie it at the back with a large black bow. Yes—she was changed. She had nothing of the *petite* charm of Veronica. But she had her mother's eyes—those beautiful brown eyes that had looked their last look of love into his sixteen years ago. Could it be that their little child was nearly sixteen? He bent down and kissed her as she stood there, white and dainty on the smutty platform.

Then he turned to Miss Tibbit. "Well, Tibby—how are you?" he said. "Did you think I was never coming back?"

"We've been expecting you for the last month, papa," said Yolande; "you generally come early in May."

Miss Tibbit regarded him with some anxiety. He was certainly more dissipated-looking in appearance; there was an uncomfortable air about him of having gone, ever so slightly, downhill—a moral descent which is so often accompanied by an indifference to personal neatness. He was no longer so scrupulously *soigné*. Late nights, hot rooms, the vitiated atmosphere and want of exercise, had painted dark stains round his eyes,

sallowed his skin, deepened the lines and wrinkles. The blue eyes were slightly bloodshot, and his features had coarsened. It was not only the long night in the train that had given him a soiled and disheveled appearance. His fine neatness of person was a thing of the past. He was quite evidently and indubitably damaged-looking. Miss Tibbit could only hope that Yolande would not perceive this change in her adored parent. He was more irritable too, inclined to be morose and gloomy; his sunny charm which had always helped one to forgive him had temporarily vanished. His temper was uncertain. He took an immediate dislike to the *pension* in the old town, and forthwith moved down to one nearer to the *plage*, and, incidentally, also to the Casino. Both Miss Tibbit and Yolande regretted this change. They had become attached to their quiet and simple abode, with its nearness to the famous sanctuary, and to those shady walks under the avenues of beech and elm and chestnut that overhung the ramparts. But they submitted without a protest to his wish. He assumed the reins of government, and his authority was after all unquestionable. Only never before had his return home produced this sense of disturbance, of irritation, of unrest and upheaval. Even Yolande shed a few secret tears—unknown to Tibby—at this hasty removal, and at the manner in which it was conducted. She guessed that something was wrong. Hitherto the lack of money had been the only cause of untoward change. But on this occasion there did not appear to be any lack of money. She did not know that her anxiety on

this point was shared by poor Tibby, who knew that there were worse things in this world than financial stress.

Miss Tibbit did not again allude to the desirability of Major Pascoe's conversion. His very appearance made the word perish miserably upon her lips. Yet she longed as never before to snatch this elusive brand from the burning. Moth-like, he emerged only with the desire to renew his acquaintance with the destroying, but alluring flame.

The passion for gambling is perhaps among the very few that know no satiety. Even advancing years can throw no cold and quenching waters upon that burning desire. Major Pascoe gambled now as never before. He won, and he was happy; he lost, and he was momentarily depressed. Something of his suave and careless good-humor returned. His invincible optimism carried him back again and again to the attack. In a few months the nest-egg of halcyon days had all been swallowed up, and Yolande, who had grown out of her last winter's clothes, owed every rag she possessed to Miss Tibbit, who kept the knowledge jealously from her.

"Tibby," said Maxim Pascoe, "that's a new hat Yolande's wearing."

"Yes, Major Pascoe," she said primly.

"You mustn't—h'm—get her anything new just now. Fact is, I've had losses. . . ." He looked at her and smiled gallantly. "Debts of honor. I must pay them before I can afford fripperies for Yolande."

She was silent for a moment! then she said:

"I will see that there is no further extravagance."

The speech was not without guile, but he did not perceive it. She sometimes wondered if he ever noticed that the bill for the said hat was never presented to him. But he did not allude to the subject again.

Miss Tibbit became more and more unhappy about him. She had by this time discovered the sinister cause of his downward progress. He was going rapidly down hill, and she could not stop him. He grew even more careless about his person, sometimes omitting to shave; he rose very late, and his outbursts of temper were alarmingly frequent. Although she mended and patched and darned, his garments betrayed the unholy poverty of their owner. There was nearly always a tumbler of absinthe by his side as he lolled back in his arm-chair reading the *New York Herald*. When she first found him thus she took him fearlessly to task. Her profession had deepened the habit of remonstrance which women so seldom lack. Her tongue could still be sharp, if necessary. You could discern in her then the governess who had been eulogized as especially successful with unruly and refractory children. When she was really angry she could still be alarming. And she was very angry when she remonstrated that morning with Major Pascoe.

"'Pon my word, Tibby," he said with lazy insolence, "one would think you were *my* governess!"

"I believe," she retorted sharply, "that if I'd

been your governess forty years ago you wouldn't want speaking to like this to-day. Unfortunately I was in the schoolroom then myself."

"But I don't want speaking to like this, Tibby," he said. His blue eyes flashed a humorous glance at her agitated countenance. But they were no longer so bright and clear. They were even a little reckless, a little bleared. The eyes gave him away—as the saying goes—even more than the unshaven cheeks, the ill-kept hands.

"Well, I'm going to speak to you now," she said, "whether you like it or not! Not for your own sake—you're a long way past that—but because of Yolande!"

"Why because of Yolande?"

"She's growing up fast—she will be sixteen soon."

"How time flies!" he murmured. "*Tempora mutantur! O tempora, O mores!* You know the tags, Tibby!"

But Miss Tibbit was not going to be put off with what she would have termed irrelevant levity.

"In another eighteen months or so she will be coming out," she said.

"Coming out? In Boulogne? Not if I know it!"

And he leaned back indolently, and sipped some of the greenish fluid in the tumbler by his side.

"And now that you've taken to *that*—!" She pointed to it with a gesture of ineffable disgust.

"It is very wholesome, Tibby," he protested.

"Not if you take it perpetually," she snapped. Then emboldened she seized the glass and flung its contents out of the window.

"You shall have no more of that to-day," she said. "It clouds your judgment. It's ruining you. Don't you suppose any one can see the change in you? I'm only hoping for your sake as well as for her own that Yolande hasn't noticed it! She is growing up, and do you think it is desirable that she should go on living in a place where her father is known to be an absinthe-drinking gambler?" She drove in her nail mercilessly.

"Oh, come now, Tibby—you're painting me a bit too black!"

"You are going down hill as fast as you can," she said. "And you haven't paid a penny here for the last six weeks!"

"They've not dunned me yet," he said nonchalantly.

"No"—she flung this at him with positive venom—"but it's only because I've paid them every sou out of my own pocket!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Tibby! You mustn't do that, you know. I'll give you a cheque on Monday. I simply can't have you paying my bills—that'll never do!" He was stirred into an unwilling sense of shame and remorse.

"And I can't have Yolande despised and insulted because of you!"

"Who's dared to insult and despise her?" He half rose now, and the blood surged to his temples. What on earth did she mean? He began to bluster.

"No one yet—I've seen to that. But I can't live forever, and I can't be a barking sheep-dog always at her heels when once she's grown up. But do you think *your* daughter is going to command respect and reverence?" She made this sword-thrust without pity for her victim. Her words made him wince.

"You're rubbing it in with salt this morning, my dear Tibby! What's the matter with you?" He resumed his seat and lit a cigarette, and looked mournfully at the ruthlessly emptied glass.

Far down in his heart he knew that he deserved every syllable of her rough speech. His shamed look reassured Tibby. She knew by long experience that it presaged contrition, and at least some purpose of amendment. But she had not yet done with him.

"It disgusts me that she, with all her beauty and charm and innocence, should have such a father!"

"I'm sure I've done my best for her." He was beginning to feel that he could not stand much more of this sort of thing; it simply wrecked one's nerves so early in the morning. Yet he had not the courage to send her out of the room.

"No, you haven't!" she snapped. "Oh, I'm not saying that you have not kept the promises you made to your wife—you'd keep your word when it's once given, I'll say that for you," she grudgingly admitted. "But you're ruining yourself body and soul, and though she doesn't know it yet she'll have to some day. Her pretty face will attract those associates of yours. That

young Vane sent her a nice note! She doesn't know, because I intercepted it. And he's gone now—a fool with more money than brains.”

All through the summer she had kept a lynx eye on those said associates. There were the pink-cheeked undergraduates, the subalterns, or the still younger aspirants to military glory, who came to Boulogne to improve their French. Many of them had cast admiring glances upon Yolande as she walked demurely along the *plage*. They were harmless if a trifle foolish. But there were also the full-lipped hawk-nosed men, whose departure always left Major Pascoe permanently poorer, and it is to be hoped at least temporarily wiser. These, too, had stared at Yolande with bold, appraising looks that filled Tibby with righteous, if suppressed wrath. “The Major’s little girl”—she could almost hear them saying—“a useful decoy-duck in a year or two. . . .” She, hardened by life, felt shame at the thought.

“I wish you could see your way to leaving Boulogne,” she went on. “Why don’t you go to England? You’ve got relations there, I suppose? You might be glad to see them again. . . .”

“And would they be glad to see me again, d’ye think, Tibby?”

The rejoinder was inevitable.

“You could at least take Yolande there—away from all this!”

“Oh, when she grows up I hope some nice young chap will come along and marry her.” Thus he airily dismissed the thought of his child’s

future which was a subject of such dark misgiving to poor Miss Tibbit.

"And is she likely to meet nice young chaps?" she inquired with cold irony. "Will they come in her way? Look at young Vane—writing a love-letter to a child of fifteen!"

"I'll shoot him if he ever comes here again," said Maxim Pascoe savagely. But his hand shook a little, and it made him wonder if he were still the unerring marksman he had once been, steady of hand and eye.

"That'll do, Tibby," he said at last; "I've had enough for one morning. And you've upset my nerves for a week attacking me like this." He pulled himself together with a gigantic effort. "You've rather exceeded your province, haven't you? I don't want to be unpleasant, because you've been very good to Yolande all these years, but I must tell you, once for all, you must confine your attentions to her. Or," he looked at her as if he were subtly measuring her, "I believe I shall have to ask you to go away—to leave us. . . ."

Miss Tibbit reddened. She had not expected this counter-move. She had never undergone the bitter experience of being dismissed; all her engagements had terminated pleasantly with mutual regret. And she had served Major Pascoe very faithfully for more than five years. She had guarded Yolande as if she had been her own child. And now he was actually suggesting that he might find it necessary to dismiss her. His words pierced her to the very heart. She blinked to keep back the slow scalding tears. Maxim

Pascoe watched her quite calmly. He was enjoying his revenge. The feeling of getting some of his own back, as he would have expressed it, was delicately soothing. She had covered him with humiliation during their interview, and she had been mercilessly frank. He enjoyed the sense of giving back blow for blow. When she went away, finding no words with which to answer his menace, they both knew that the ultimate victory remained with him. He still retained the whip-hand of the situation. She could not send him away, but he could and certainly would send her away. She felt then that to part with Yolande would be the final tragedy of her life. She bowed her head, submitting to the inevitable. Never again did Tibby venture to remonstrate with Maxim Pascoe. She was afraid of the consequences which he had so clearly delineated.

CHAPTER IV

MAJOR PASCOE never again alluded to the prospect of parting with Miss Tibbit; she was careful not to give him any cause for doing so. She continued to act as amateur Providence to these two people. It was not an easy task, perhaps it was the most difficult she had ever set herself to do, but she was a brave woman and well-fitted for it. Being pious she invoked the aid of many saints to assist her with their prayers. She exercised a wary vigilance over both Maxim Pascoe and his daughter. Her plain speaking had not been without effect. For the time he went no further down the hill. He hid the absinthe from Yolande, and if he still drank it he drank secretly. Miss Tibbit watched this slight effort at reform with approbation. But she was mortal and could not be in two places at once. Her untiring vigilance baffled the devil who sought to devour her employer; that Prince of Darkness therefore turned his attentions to the little Yolande.

“Is that Major Pascoe’s little girl—grown out of all knowledge, Tibby?” said a cool, velvet-like voice on the Plage.

“Yes, Marquise—this is Yolande.”

Yolande took the slim hand in its dainty glove of pale suède and made a little reverence, as the

young French girls do to an older woman of higher rank.

Looking up she saw a very charming sight. The Marquise de Solignac was an Englishwoman of the most cosmopolitan kind. She was very beautiful, with wonderful hair of a warm red gold and eyes that were almost violet. She was a person who set fashions rather than followed them. She was beautiful in a very unusual way. Few people could pass her in the street without turning to look at her. In the first place she was extremely tall and her coloring was so vivid that it was conspicuous. She tried to subdue it by wearing black or white or neutral tints, but they only served to enhance that wonderful fairness of hers. She had been a widow now for some years, and although she was still a year or two short of forty, her only daughter (who had once been Tibby's pupil) was already married. The Marquise was a very rich woman and she had a passion for traveling in which she was able to indulge to her heart's content. She had houses or apartments almost all over the world. That was another whim. She had flats in New York and St. Petersburg, a bungalow in Ceylon among the mountains of Kandy where she was fond of wintering, a villa in Italy, an hotel in Paris, and lastly—perhaps the least important of all—the Villa Falaise a few miles outside of Boulogne.

Since her daughter's marriage she came seldom to Boulogne, and until this meeting on the Plage she had not seen Miss Tibbit for some years. But they corresponded occasionally, and the Marquise was aware that she was still acting

as governess to Major Pascoe's little girl. She thought of Yolande—if she ever thought of her at all—as still quite a little girl. She did not care for Major Pascoe, whom she knew but slightly. But she was very capricious in her friendships, and there and then she took a fancy to the grave, dark-eyed girl who bent over her hand and made a graceful little reverence.

Perhaps it would have been better for Yolande if she had not done so.

"She is nearly eighteen now, Marquise," added Tibby. She hated to think that the girl was too old to require a governess. Yet the lessons still went on daily from sheer force of habit.

"You must come and see me at the Villa Falaise," said the Marquise. Her voice was, Yolande thought, the most beautiful she had ever heard. It was low and soft and thrilling, like music.

"Oh, I should love to come," she said eagerly.

"Come to-morrow, then," said the Marquise carelessly. "Breakfast is at twelve. I have a few people coming and we shall play tennis afterwards. Do let her have a half-holiday, Tibby." And she smiled at them both and went forward to greet another friend who was just approaching her.

It was a very hot summer that year when Yolande celebrated her eighteenth birthday. Major Pascoe had a bad heart attack, and in consequence Tibby did not accompany Yolande to the Villa Falaise, but sent her alone in a fiacre with many injunctions as to how she was to behave. She had some scruples about letting her go at all, for

she could remember the very perfunctory surveillance which the Marquise had meted out to her own daughter. Still, she reflected, not much harm could be done in a single afternoon, spent for the most part in vigorous games of tennis.

Major Pascoe was in bed; he looked extremely wretched and his annoyance was increased by the fact that he had done nothing to bring on an attack. There had not been the slightest imprudence, and here he was lying like a log. He was always very sorry for himself and extremely alarmed at his own condition.

Miss Tibbet, who was a born nurse, tended him exactly as if he had been a sick and fretful baby.

"Extremes, my dear Tibby, are the devil!" he said with an assumption of his old jauntiness. "You must blame the thermometer this time! I have been to bed almost with the sun these last three weeks. I have drunk nothing but the contents of syphons." Green in the face he was yet a brave and gallant figure.

Tibby nursed him with much solicitude. Her eight years' faithful and limpet-like devotion had made her as necessary to him as to Yolande. And he was not an easy patient to manage.

"Where's Yolande? Why aren't you barking at her heels this afternoon?" he inquired.

She looked up placidly from her knitting.

"She's lunching with Madame de Solignac. I told her to come home in good time for dinner," she answered slowly.

He liked to see her sitting there, vigilant, prepared, competent. These attacks came on so

suddenly, made you feel afraid to be left alone. Yet at times he was ashamed to make such demands upon Tibby's time and strength, though it was comforting to have her at hand to arrange his pillows, to raise him when he was gasping for breath, to administer food and the fizzy contents of syphons.

"I don't care for her to go alone to places," she added. "Still they are to play tennis, and the exercise and fresh air will be beneficial."

"Oh, she'll be all right there. You needn't fret about her," he said.

"We met the Marquise yesterday—she seemed surprised to find Yolande so grown-up. I think she took a fancy to her," said Tibby.

The Major smiled.

"There's not another girl to touch her in Boulogne," he said with a pardonable pride.

To Yolande, tall, willowy, and extremely dainty in a white dress of Tibby's fashioning, the Marquise presented a young compatriot, Mr. Gifford Lumleigh, who was, she said, spending a few weeks in Boulogne for the purpose of perfecting himself in the French language.

Whether he made sufficient use of his other opportunities for acquiring the elusive Gallic idiom, it is perhaps not necessary to inquire, but on that particular afternoon his progress could not have been remarkable. He spoke only English, and he spoke only to Yolande, and she answered him in her soft voice with its pretty touch of foreign accent.

Gifford Lumleigh was then about three-and-

twenty. He was a younger son with no very brilliant outlook. But he was extremely good-looking, and Yolande fell in love with him that very day, almost, it must be confessed, that very hour.

He was tall—not so tall as her father, but with an upright, well-knit figure; his hair was light brown and crisped to the roots, his eyes were gray, and he had peculiarly long, black lashes which lent them depth and fire. When he smiled his eyes laughed as well as his mouth, and dimples showed in his firm, sunburnt cheeks. He looked very much alive—almost defiantly alive.

It would be too much, perhaps, to say that he fell in love with Yolande that very afternoon, but he found her singularly attractive. Although she was so young she was self-possessed and *chic*. He wondered who her people were. He asked her a few delicately-worded questions. People never found it hard to confide in Gifford, and Yolande had still all the frankness of an unsophisticated child. So he soon learned that she had lived almost all her life in Boulogne with her father, and that Tibby had also lived with them for eight years. Tibby was her darling old governess. She would have come to-day, only she had remained at home to look after Yolande's father who was ill. Had Gifford been in the habit of offering promiscuous thanksgivings he would probably have made an act of gratitude for the chance absence of Tibby. And had he been aware of her personality that act would have increased a thousandfold in fervor. For then there would have been no strolling

through the garden down to the sands, and sitting in the shadow of the wall watching the tiny waves curl and break on that shining smooth surface. Who was Mr. Gifford Lumleigh that he should make Yolande conspicuous through all that summer afternoon?

They lived in a pension. No—they had never had a house or villa of their own. It must be charming to have a house like the Villa Falaise, with a beautiful garden sloping almost to the sea. And Boulogne generally suited her father, except in the very hot weather. No—she never went to balls. She did not think Tibby would approve. It was quite an event for her to come like this to the Villa Falaise. She very seldom went anywhere. From such timidly offered scraps of information Gifford soon learned a good deal about her, perhaps as much as he wanted to know. She did not really amuse him at all, but she was so pretty he felt that he could have sat there and looked at her forever. That hair of fine silken darkness demurely parted in a fashion then not in vogue, those deep eyes like brown pools at once dark and clear and withal unfathomable, that quivering smile, the small delicate features, the little hands and feet, the slim and long neck, all seemed to him to contribute to the singular perfection of her. Her white dress of embroidered muslin with its belt of folded blue ribbon was charmingly appropriate. How could he guess the long hours of toil which that dress represented? Even Yolande herself scarcely knew that. Tibby's faithful fingers had put in every inch of it. She was

a Catholic, this too she told him, and seemed a little surprised that he was not one. She had lived always in a Catholic country, and had never come in contact with Protestants; she but dimly realized that her father was not *pratiquant*, and had sometimes wondered why. The novelty of her position and of her life attracted Gifford, whose curiosity was always piqued by the unknown, the unexplored. He formed a mental picture of Papa—elderly, dignified, gray-haired, with a fine military bearing. Maxim's name was unknown to him. He had only been a few days in Boulogne, and a friend, Dermot O'Neill, had introduced him to the Marquise. This was his first visit to the Villa Falaise. His hostess knew little of him except the fact that he was Lord Strode's younger son, and she knew still less of his history. She took no interest in English affairs.

When Gifford saw Major Pascoe for the first time on the Plage a few days later it gave him something of a shock. The dimmed blue eyes and slightly restored hair—this was a new departure—caused him a keen pang of disappointment. He tried to fit in that debonair yet damaged figure at Merrywood, and it refused to fit in anywhere. To introduce that man at home! The thought suddenly showed him how far he had already traveled in dreams along the matrimonial road. The bare idea made his heart sink. He could imagine his father regarding Major Pascoe with the cold and bleak smile with which he invariably welcomed the unhonored and possibly self-invited guest. Lord Strode was a man

with a tongue. Even Gifford was afraid of it. More than anything else in the world he feared that mocking irony. Many times he had emerged raw from its application. Yolande was beautiful, charming and desirable, but she did not belong to his world. He had no ambition to marry a girl who needed explaining. "The daughter of that dreadful Pascoe man at Boulogne!" That was how she would be quite inevitably described.

The Marquise de Solignac was a *complaisante* hostess. She liked to have young people about her, and like most women, she enjoyed watching a love-affair and wondering what would come of it. Fate was extremely propitious to Gifford Lumleigh. His friend, O'Neill, was called suddenly home, and therefore there was no one to answer any questions about him, and he had recently passed through a crisis which made him fear questions. The Marquise knew that he belonged to a good, if recently ennobled, English family. She was aware that in England—her native land of which she knew so little and for which she cared so much less—it was permitted for a young man to choose and woo his own bride. She pitied Yolande for having such a disreputable father bent on ruining himself through the twin demons of gambling and absinthe. And she encouraged the affair for she felt assured, in her ignorance, that it would be an excellent marriage for Yolande, and remove her at an early age from such disastrous and detrimental surroundings. Therefore, perceiving with an experienced, astute, but tolerant eye

the trend of affairs, she offered opportunities to the young couple for frequent meetings under the roof of the Villa Falaise. She was assisted in this benevolent intention by the fact that Tibby, still unsuspecting, was guarding with a necessary vigilance the convalescence of Major Pascoe, who was now able to take gentle exercise in the cool of the evening upon the Plage.

The Villa Falaise stood square to the sea upon the lower spur of the cliff and just below the road that cut along it. Beyond the high garden-wall the wide sands stretched, hard, firm, golden. In the more sheltered parts of the garden hydrangeas and roses and fuchsias bloomed the summer through, and the flower-beds were rosy with begonias, and white with marguerite daisies. Later there would be chrysanthemums in soft blots of crimson and pink and gold. The house was painted white and was too square to be beautiful, only the casement windows and the gray wooden shutters broke the monotony of its walls. The high-pitched roof sloping steeply was of silvery gray slate. But it was comfortable and solid-looking. It knew the gray northern sea in all its moods; the laughing blue of its summer ways; the fierce wild anger of its spring and autumn tempests, the cold bright hard silver of its winter calm. The villa lay in an isolated position, quite apart from Boulogne and rather nearer to the little white village of St. Vincent, a fishing-hamlet where already giant hotels and painted chalets were beginning to spring up to satisfy the growing love of the Parisians for sea-bathing. From the back windows of Villa

Falaise the lights of St. Vincent were plainly visible nestling under the foot of the cliff, and grouped along both of the low and grassy banks of the river which here cut its way through the sand and joined the sea. Further inland the gray arches of the aqueduct rose above the river, and there the trains could be seen passing to and from Paris, moving at night like dark and swift snakes illuminated with squares of pale orange fire.

Nearly every afternoon through those days of royal June weather when the grass on the cliffs was bright as an emerald, and the wide pale sands ran out to meet a sea that was calm and blue as a lake, Yolande met Gifford Lumleigh at the Villa Falaise. Sometimes a few people gathered there for tennis; sometimes the Marquise left them in the garden to amuse each other, or urged them to go and sit by the sea. Yolande was looking pale and fagged, she affirmed; it was very trying for her to be pent up so much in hot Boulogne; the sea air would do her good. And nearly every evening when the beautiful twilight spread over land and sea like a delicate veil of ebony-blue, Gifford would walk home with her to the dingy little *pension* in a narrow side street off the Quai Gambetta. But one evening they left earlier than usual and he persuaded her to climb with him to the top of the cliff, and walk home past the little chapel near the Calvary, and through the Rue de la Tour d'Odre. They stood in the little enclosure where the Calvary looks down upon the harbor, and for a few minutes both were silent.

Far off the English cliffs lay mirage-like, bathed in a pool of sunlight half gold half crimson, across a sea so calm that it seemed to be fashioned of some ethereal silver substance. Sea-gulls circled and poised in mid-air, their white scimitar shapes dividing the blue of sky and sea. Here and there the brown sail of a fishing-boat cut the shining silver as with a heavy blot; then a steamer passed, trailing its cloud of translucent black smoke.

At their feet the cliff fell almost perpendicularly, clothed with vivid green verdure. Above them the Calvary, which watches the vessels that ply in and out of the busy port, stood sharply etched against the sky. Yolande glanced at the tortured Face and knelt to say a prayer. She had never come here without doing this, and the thought of Gifford being with her did not disturb her. He was so kind; he would understand. . . . And as she prayed she asked for his love. She knew now that she loved him; she knew that there had been born a new fear in her heart that he did not love her. And why should he love her? Yet it would have been perfect to win Gifford's love. She trembled even as she knelt there, because she had formed her wish into words and laid it before the Crucified. She had a timid hope that this would sanctify what was already so sacred. . . . And he would never guess, never know, what she was whispering so low that her lips scarcely moved. She had never before felt so moved, so entranced, as she was by this wonderful new emotion. Always when she came here she had thought only of the prayers of

the poor fisher-folk, the women in their white coifs and black dresses, who came here to pray for their men at sea. The place had held for her an atmosphere of tragic prayer, as if the very waves must be crying: "Christ save him—Christ bring him back to me!" Often in days of tempest she had seen the little chapel quite full of praying, weeping women. Not when the sea lay calm as now, serene and mirror-like, a thing of beauty and peace, but when the storm-tossed waves dashed unrestrained upon the shore, flinging clouds of white spray high into the air, beating against breakwater and lighthouse, and swallowing up the little fishing-boats that would never again return, with their proud red sails unfurled, into the harbor. Yes . . . the sea was the enemy as well as the friend; giving life and sustenance and then taking all away. *Disparu en mer* was the epitaph on many of those memorial wreaths within the little votive chapel.

When she rose from her knees Gifford was looking at her. She turned a shade paler under the bright scrutiny of his eyes.

"Aren't they simply awful—those bead wreaths and artificial flowers?" he said, with an odd attempt to speak carelessly.

But her face was very grave.

"Perhaps . . . they do not seem so to me. Perhaps it is because I am accustomed to them. And I know some of the poor people who put them there—with tears and prayers. . . ."

With tears and prayers. . . . He never knew quite what was in those words that moved him so strangely. Perhaps it was the soft shy way in

which they were uttered. Perhaps it was the manner of her kneeling there—so simply, so naturally—to pray. He wondered what her prayer had been. But as she stood there in the fast-fading light Gifford knew that she had never seemed so beautiful to him before. He came a step towards her and held out his arms.

"Come to me," he said. His lips trembled; his vision was blurred; he looked almost dazed. "Come . . . Yolande . . . my darling . . ."

She stood there transfixed. This was a new Gifford—and was not this also a new earth, bathed and stained with the bright glory of the sunset?

"Darling . . . darling . . . I must speak . . . I must tell you. . . I love you more than all the world. Come close to me, Yolande. . . ."

Then he came quietly up to her and took her in his arms. The next thing she knew was the touch of his lips on hers—a soft yet burning touch, wounding yet healing. "Beloved . . . beloved . . ." the evening air vibrated with the passion of that moment. Far off the gentle lap-lap of the waves on those smooth, golden sands—such little waves, with their curling crests so luminously white—reached her ears. Overhead a sea-gull flew past, uttering a shrill, frightened cry. And Yolande leaned against her lover, supported by his arms, trembling and afraid, almost swooning with this strange fierce happiness that had taken possession of her. . . .

"Why did you pray?" he said. "What were you praying for?" He longed to know the secrets of that heart.

But she looked up with a child's simplicity.

"I was praying that you might love me," she said gravely. "You see . . . I have been loving you . . . for quite a long time. . . ."

Those kisses had frightened her; that intimate touch of love had been a rough thing of earth breaking in upon a dream that seemed sent from Heaven. Gifford's arms were hard and powerful; she was imprisoned in their embrace. She would have liked to creep away and kneel quite, quite alone in the little chapel, and think only of his words that had seemed so beautiful—"Beloved . . . beloved . . . I love you." She had not needed anything but that—the assurance of his love. And had he not said that he loved her more than all the world? Surely this was enough; surely this must make her happy for ever.

Then Gifford forgot wisdom and prudence, the tradition of his house, the clause in his grandfather's will which should have made him turn away from her at the first whisper of love in his heart; he forgot the battered and damaged figure of Major Pascoe, forgot even the sharp malice of his father's tongue, and asked Yolande to marry him.

"But, of course, since we love each other," she said simply. "When people love each other they marry, do they not?" She looked at him with wide eyes of innocence.

"Not always, Yolande," he said; "but sometimes they marry when they do not love—and that is hell." He ground his teeth and his eyes grew almost fierce behind their veil of black lashes.

So she had taken for granted that they would be married, whereas to Gifford it had seemed only the reckless inevitable sequence to his mad moment of self-betrayal.

"Yolande," he said hesitatingly, "do you really love me very much?"

"Yes . . ." she said, her eyes downcast. She had freed herself and was standing in front of him, spent now with emotion; she looked like a little drooping flower.

Gifford's face was oddly set; he looked old for his years, worn with experience and perhaps embittered by it. His mouth was a little grim.

"Do you love me enough to trust me?" he said.

Over the sea towards England the sun was setting in a great pool of clear gold. The light of it touched Yolande's face and hair.

"It would be sad to love where you could not trust," she answered.

"Yes," he said, "I think it would. So I want you to trust me enough to feel that I know what is best." He paused. "You see, we can't be openly engaged, Yolande. You mustn't tell any one that we are going to be married. I mean . . . I shall have to go home first . . . and see my father and obtain his consent. I am absolutely dependent on him, and if he isn't pleased he won't give me any money—and we can't marry without money. That is why I am going to ask you to keep it all a secret—our beautiful love—our promise to marry each other. You mustn't tell the Marquise, or your father, or . . . or," he hesitated, "or Tibby. I must go home first, and then I shall come back and claim you, and we will

tell every one. . . .” His eyes darkened as they rested upon her; he would have kissed her again, but she drew away from him. It seemed to her as if something of the wonderful brightness had passed away from the sky, as if the wind that crept up the cliff from the sea was a little sad, a little chilling.

“No,” she said, “do not kiss me, please. You should perhaps have spoken to your father first, and he would have written to mine, and then there would have been no need of secrets . . . and you would not have kissed me. . . .”

“Oh, but that is only a silly French notion, Yolande,” he said. “We arrange things for ourselves in England. . . .”

Yolande had a scruple. She was afraid of secrets. It is true that she had never, during all the past wonderful week, spoken to Tibby of Gifford; but then he had been only a dream-god, not a man who had said that he loved her, and held her in his arms, and kissed her many, many times. How could she keep this a secret from Tibby? And if Tibby questioned her, she could not possibly tell her an untruth. . . . Her pale, disturbed look smote Gifford with remorse. He felt alarmed.

“What is it, dear Yolande?” he said. “What is the matter, my dearest dear?”

He waited anxiously, miserably, for her answer.

“But if your father objects to me, if he does not approve of our marriage and gives you no money, what will happen then?” She spoke in a quiet sweet way that touched him.

"We should have to wait," he said firmly, "till he gave in. You would wait for me, wouldn't you, darling?"

Kisses, he felt, would have reassured her better than words. But he saw that she would permit no more kisses; there was something of the cold little statue about her, half loving, half reproachful, puzzled suddenly by the complicated labyrinth of life's ways.

"I should not have said that I loved you," she said; "that was the mistake. But you spoke so suddenly. No—we cannot be engaged. I have never had any secrets from dear old Tibby. I will not see you again till you have won your father's permission." She held her little head very high. "Now we will go home."

They walked back in silence. At the door of the pension she held out her hand and said goodbye quite gravely, without a smile.

"Shan't I see you again?" he said dejectedly.

"Oh, yes—when you come back, when everything is arranged."

"I can see," he said miserably, "that you don't trust me. I wonder what made you pray that I might love you?"

"But it is not a question of trusting you," she said. "You tell me you must ask your father's permission, and that without it we cannot be married. So it is no use our being engaged or having a secret. But I think you have been wrong. You should have asked your father first, before you spoke of love. Before," and her eyes looked very straight into his, "before you kissed me."

"I loved you too much," he said. "I had to

“speak. When I saw you, kneeling there and praying with the sun on your hair, I had to speak. I wanted to make sure that you loved me—that all these days at the Falaise hadn’t been a foolish summer dream.”

“Good-by,” she said again.

He bent over her hand, touched it with his lips, and moved slowly and reluctantly away.

It was his own fault, he told himself; he had been clumsy and spoiled the whole thing. But then he had expected her to be as simple and obedient as a child, ready to do just what he told her. It was the unexpected strength and firmness she had displayed which had at once surprised and dismayed him.

CHAPTER V

YOLANDE meditated deeply all through the night upon the events of that golden June afternoon. A vague, yet disturbing sense of unhappiness and disquietude possessed her. She had sent Gifford away—probably if he were so eager to interview his father he would leave immediately for England; she had bade him farewell coldly and proudly, and she wondered how long it would be before he would return and make her renew her promise to marry him. She would miss him. It would be sad to spend so many days—perhaps even weeks—without seeing him. But she wished that she had not permitted those kisses. Her cheeks burned as she thought of it—that long passionate embrace when he had held her half-swooning in his arms. She almost wished it had been possible to die then, as in a beautiful dream. For then her happiness had been complete. She had prayed, and the answer to her prayer had come as if on swift wings. She had asked for Gifford's love, kneeling on the stone steps of that wayside shrine, and almost as soon as she had risen to her feet he had told her that he loved her. She could hear him saying: "*Come to me. . . . Come, Yolande, my darling . . . come close to me. . . . I love you. . . .*" The words had held for her all the

magical music of the spheres. She trembled at the remembrance of it all. She was back on the cliff; she saw the skies and the sands turning to crimson in that wonderful sunset; she saw the little blue waves shivering as they broke foam-crested on the shore. And far off on the low horizon she could see the English cliffs lying luminously white between the gold of the sky and the strange silver-blueness of the sea. And Gifford had stood there—beautiful in her eyes as the Sun-God—telling her that he loved her in words of unimagined tenderness.

No, she could not tell Tibby about the kisses. She felt that Tibby would blame Gifford. She might scold her, but she would be very angry with Gifford. And she would think it her duty to tell Major Pascoe, and he too would be angry with Gifford. Afterwards when he came back—when the engagement was announced—she would tell them both. But not now. . . . She felt almost as if she did not wish to see Gifford again; she did not want him to look in her face and read there that she was ashamed.

In the morning a note was brought to her. That, too, was done secretly. Gifford had given the *concierge* a gold piece to ensure this. She flushed to the roots of her hair at the man's glance of sly intelligence and understanding; it seemed to soil her. Yet when she took it up to her room she kissed the writing on the envelope before she broke the seal. If she had expected a love-letter—and surely there would be some word of love in this, the first of all his dear letters!—she was dis-

appointed. Only a few words, cold, business-like, such as a stranger might have written. He was leaving Boulogne at once. She must not write to him, but he would write to her as soon as possible. He gave her no address, and as she had no idea who his father was, she could not have written to him even if she had wished to do so.

A whole week passed and no news of him came. She avoided the Marquise, never seeking the hospitality of Villa Falaise. When one day Tibby suggested that they should walk out there in the afternoon, Yolande rather listlessly declined. The hot weather, she said, made her indolent. Tibby spoke quite sharply, rebuking her for sins of sloth. She did nothing now but "moon about" all day, Susan Tibbit severely informed her. Yolande bore the unaccustomed scolding with uneasy patience. She was afraid that Tibby might guess something was the matter.

She kissed her. "Don't be cross with me, please, Tibby dear," she said coaxingly. "I'm all right really. It's only the heat, and my room is so stuffy at night. When it gets a little cooler I'll be as energetic as you like."

Tibby was quickly mollified. But she looked at Yolande rather searchingly.

"You're not feeling ill, dear?" she said anxiously.

"No—you silly old Tibby—of course I'm not!"

"Your father's talking of going to Paris; he wants us to go too," said Miss Tibbit.

"But we can't afford it," Yolande objected.

"I'm afraid we can. He has plenty of money just now. And he says you can get some new

frocks and hats to wear when you go to Villa Falaise."

"But I don't really need them," said the girl, turning rather white. "I don't expect to go to the Villa Falaise again. The Marquise was talking of taking a chalet at Terre Haute among the pine woods. She says she is tired of the glare from the sea." She spoke rapidly, as if trying to hide her own embarrassment.

"Well, anyhow, you'd better make up your mind to go to Paris," said Tibby; "it'll be a change—and it's only for a few weeks."

"Oh, Tibby dear," said the girl imploringly, "I don't want to go away. Try and persuade him to stay here. . . ."

Miss Tibbet looked steadily at Yolande.

"Why, I thought you'd be so pleased," she said calmly; "what's the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing's the matter," said Yolande rather desperately; "only I'd rather be here."

Supposing Gifford returned and found her gone? The thought was unthinkable. . . .

"You're not still seeing that English boy you met at the Falaise?" said Tibby.

She had drawn her bow at a venture. But that it had struck the mark was amply evidenced by its effect upon her victim. Yolande's face was no longer pale; it was aflame; she only wished the floor would open and swallow her up, and hide those shameful burning blushes from the astute and penetrating eyes of Susan Tibbit.

Tibby was merciless. The "dangerous age" was, in her opinion, anywhere between sixteen and twenty, and not, as more modern psycholo-

gists affirm, the maturer one of forty. She followed up her triumph.

"Do you think I haven't got eyes, Yolande?" she said.

The girl was silent.

"It's the first time you've ever been silly about any one, and I didn't think you were very silly, or I should have spoken to you before. How long's he going to stop?"

"He's gone," said Yolande in a low, stifled voice; "he went away three days ago. . . ."

Would Tibby extract the confession of those mad secret kisses?

"And I hope he'll stay away," said Miss Tibbit briskly. "He was not one that meant anything—I could see that. You're not waiting for him to come back, are you?"

What could she say? It seemed that in those three days—lonely letterless days—hope had been dying a slow, hard death in her heart.

"Not fretting, are you?" said Tibby.

She shook her head.

"Don't ask me, Tibby," she said; "don't ask me, please. I can't tell you—I don't know. We will go to Paris, if papa wishes it."

But Paris was not to be her destiny. The Marquise de Solignac, who had indolently observed the sudden departure of Mr. Lumleigh for England, had wondered if Yolande had had any share in it. The young man had seemed decidedly taken with her, and she had hoped that something might come of it. When she next met Yolande on the Plage she stopped her.

It was a moment of agonized anxiety for Yolande, since Miss Tibbit was with her. But the Marquise was always tactful, and she knew that dear Tibby could be a dragon if she chose. Besides, the girl looked unusually pale, and her eyes were rimmed with dark bistre-colored shadows. She took compassion on her.

"I've taken that *châlet* among the pine woods at *Terre Haute*," she said; "it's a charming little place and delightfully shady. It's quite close to the dunes and the sea. Why don't you come out there and spend a week with me, Yolande? I shall be going to-morrow!"

"We are going to Paris, thank you, Marquise," said Miss Tibbit, who was not sure, after all, that this intimacy with the Marquise was a desirable thing for Yolande. "Major Pascoe has made up his mind to go at the end of the week."

Although she was a very indolent and indifferent woman the Marquise disliked intensely to be thwarted, even in quite little things. She was sure that Miss Tibbit was hostile to the plan of Yolande accompanying her to *Terre Haute*. Perhaps she had heard rumors of the brief flirtation between her charge and young Lumleigh, and considered that she had not exercised sufficient surveillance. She had had in the old days some disputes with Tibby on this point in regard to her own daughter. Her dark violet eyes flashed with a hint of temper.

"But it will be far better for Yolande to have a little country air. Every one says it's horribly hot in Paris now. It is just the moment for a

little agreeable *villégiature*," and she smiled charmingly upon the girl. "Wouldn't you like to come with me, Yolande? It'll be very dull, of course, only our two selves, but we can bathe and sit in the woods and do all kinds of nice idle things!"

"I should like to come very much," said Yolande, "perhaps papa would let me. I will ask him." It was her very first overt act of rebellion against Tibby's rule.

"Ah, that is a very good idea," said the Marquise; "and I will write a supplementary letter to Major Pascoe and tell him I must positively insist upon his letting you come. I shall look upon it as quite settled, then? Be ready to start at three." She waved her hand in adieu.

Yolande and Miss Tibbit walked back almost in silence. But when they entered the *pension* she followed the girl up to her bedroom. Yolande removed her gloves and hat in a weary listless manner. Tibby watched her. She wished to speak to her, and she did not quite know what to say. If Yolande could have confided in her then, her future might have been very different. But she was annoyed at being treated like a child; she was vexed at Tibby's authoritative attitude. It was absurd now that she was eighteen, and had had a proposal of marriage! And Tibby, feeling the reins slacken in her hand, had a mind to pull the curb sharply.

"I shall speak to your father, Yolande," she said, "and ask him not to let you go to Terre Haute. You meet very undesirable people at

the Marquise's, and she isn't the least use as a chaperon."

"I want to go," said Yolande, rather obstinately. She was fighting for that last chance of seeing Gifford, which would certainly be destroyed if she went to Paris. She did not care now if she hurt Tibby. The primitive woman was aroused and, child as she was, she meant to see Gifford at all costs if he displayed any wish to see her. And she was not going to be thwarted by Tibby. Her little white face indicated now a passionate mutiny.

"You're thinking if you go there you'll be more likely to meet that Lumleigh boy again," said Miss Tibbit. "You know nothing about him. If he had meant anything he would have come to see your father. And he did not come."

She had never had a scene with Yolande before. But the girl's very reticence seemed to spell danger. And she had heard that Mr. Lumleigh was very good-looking. Probably he had been amusing himself, and Yolande was a mere baby, quite without knowledge of the world. Tibby was paying dearly for that period of relaxed vigilance. But it was not too late to bring the episode to a sharp conclusion.

"I'm not going to have you going there, Yolande," she said. "You must please understand that."

"You can't stop me, if papa gives me permission to go," said Yolande.

"I shall go and speak to him."

She went out of the room. Yolande sat by the

window and the tears gathered in her eyes. She hated to quarrel with Tibby whom she loved so fondly. She was sick with suspense awaiting the result of that interview. It seemed so long, so very long, before Tibby's firm and rather heavy tread sounded once more on the stairs. She came into the room and noticed at once the traces of weeping on Yolande's face.

Yolande looked up. She felt too exhausted now to ask what the result had been.

"Your father says you can go to *Terre Haute* to-morrow," she said. Her voice sounded harsh. The interview had not been an agreeable one. Major Pascoe's mind had been a little clouded by absinthe; he had spoken in rather a maudlin manner of his poor little motherless girl who had so few pleasures. When Tibby began to argue he got quite angry. Between the two she could do nothing. She would have to stay alone in *Boulogne*, wondering what mischief they were both getting into. It was not a pleasant prospect. She had tried to assert her authority and it had been of no avail. Yolande was a woman now; she must face the fact. And she was Major Pascoe's daughter.

"I'm sorry—that you are not pleased about it, Tibby," said Yolande, feeling that her petty triumph was a trifle bitter to the taste. "But I do want to go so very much." She rose and put out her arms, but Miss Tibbit drew a little away.

"Don't be silly, Yolande," she said with some asperity. "You've got your own way and I hope it won't hurt you in the end. Now I'd better look over your clothes." She went to the chest of

drawers and wardrobe and began to arrange the various articles of apparel on the bed. "Get your work-box—you can help me with these. I can't let you go in rags." She held up a newly washed white muslin dress. "I'll look this over while you darn the stockings." She was once more the governess, competent, authoritative and dictatorial. Yolande obeyed meekly. She wondered if she would still have to darn stockings when she was married. She had always hated sewing, nevertheless Tibby had never let her off this particular task and she was now extremely proficient at it. They both sat down and sewed in gloomy silence.

On the following day at the appointed hour the Marquise de Solignac came to fetch her. And a little later Major Pascoe started alone for Paris, with many and deep feelings of gratitude towards his daughter's hostess for having procured him an unexpected holiday, free from surveillance of any kind.

CHAPTER VI

THE Châlet des Pins at Terre Haute was certainly a desirable place for a secluded villégiatura. It stood quite near the edge of the dark pine woods, and overlooked in furtive glimpses the white dunes and the sea beyond. Yolande had so seldom left Boulogne that the very prospect of the change excited her as if she had been a child. Moreover, she felt sure that when Gifford returned to France he would probably at once repair to the Villa Falaise to obtain news of her, and would certainly be directed forthwith to Terre Haute where he would find her. She hoped perhaps that the Marquise would invite him to stay. There was plenty of room in the châlet. These agreeable dreams sufficed to make her radiantly happy for the first few days of her visit.

She had plenty of liberty—more than she had ever had in her life before. She was allowed to roam about the woods and over the dunes, through the scrub of tamarisk and wild myrtle, where the long dark green grass was brushed by the sea-wind. Every morning before the mid-day *déjeuner* she and the Marquise bathed in the sea from a little wooden pavilion that had been built close to the shore. It was a charming little spot half-hidden by the pines. During the after-

noon they generally retired for a *siesta*, and later there would be people driving over from Terre Haute to have tea in the shady garden. All these people—who were for the most part French—congratulated the Marquise upon her charming little guest. Some of the men paid her compliments and told her that she was beautiful. The women caressed her and afterwards regretted that she had no *dot*. It would be so difficult to find a husband for her, unless she went to England where daughters never received *dots*. On the whole, Yolande enjoyed her first taste of emancipation excessively. She was beginning, almost unknown to herself, to resent Tibby's rule. But they had never come into actual collision until this visit to Terre Haute had been mooted. Then Yolande had very quietly fought for her own. If it had not been for the thought of Gifford she would probably have submitted with her usual docility to Tibby's fiat. But the very possibility of his coming and not finding her in Boulogne, and learning perhaps that she had gone to Paris, had roused her latent obstinacy.

A week, ten days, passed in agreeable monotony at the Châlet des Pins, and no news had come of Gifford. Yolande tried to view the situation calmly, assuring herself that he was in duty bound to obey his father in all things. She had insensibly acquired something of the French view of marriage, and of the paramount necessity of obtaining the parental consent before one could be arranged. She was not aware that such conditions did not prevail in England.

But the very fact of waiting and the suspense

it involved told upon her. Deep in her heart she knew that she loved Gifford, and she felt that that heart would break if he never came back. She could not envisage the prospect of a permanent separation from him. He must come back—even if it were only to tell her of the futility of his errand, of his father's insurmountable obduracy. She bore the trial patiently and secretly, nevertheless she suffered severely. Her eyes were heavy with sleeplessness, the lips that Gifford had kissed into silence had a determined expression that seemed to change her to a sudden maturity. That brief love episode, at once thrilling and bitter-sweet, had left its mark. She made one or two abortive efforts to tell the Marquise, and failed. It would have been, however, much easier to tell her than to confide in Tibby.

But her malady of soul increased as the days wore on. The very remembrance of Gifford tortured and shamed her. He had won her love too easily—and then had left her. What was there in her that his parents could not accept? Herein lay a new source of humiliation. Her first personal experience of love had so far proved a bitter one, taking, as it seemed to her now, all the magic color from sea and sky, and leaving only a gray and solitary desolation. The image of Gifford filled her thoughts. When she walked alone on the dunes or by the sea-shore she visualized him with such accuracy that it almost seemed as if he were walking beside her. She could see his strong yet slim and upright figure, the handsome face alternately so bright and so gloomy with sudden bitter sullenness; the black

fringe of lashes that gave his eyes such an uncommon and peculiar look, the bronzed face and hands, the crisped thick hair. It was difficult to believe now that he loved her, that he had asked her to marry him and assured her of his adoration. That *Come close to me, Yolande, my darling*, must have been spoken to some other woman in some other life. Not by him; not to her. . . . His silence showed the necessity for prudence, and demonstrated most clearly his father's displeasure. Yolande knew nothing then of the house of Strode, its complications, its feuds, its enmities. She began to feel quite sure that he would never return; she told herself, indeed, that she had ceased to expect him. And perhaps in time she would learn to forget that mad moment of love on the cliffs overhanging the sea. . . .

"Yolande," called the Marquise, breaking in abruptly upon her reverie. "Where are you? Are you not coming down to tea?"

Yolande came slowly into the garden. Her hostess was alone, presiding over a tea-table that was truly English. It was perhaps the one remaining evidence of her nationality of which she had so little trace.

"Am I late?" She sat down by her side.

"No, you're not late," said the Marquise laughing at her serious expression. "Only I've got a piece of news for you. I have had a letter from your friend, Mr. Lumleigh. . . ."

She watched the girl with lazy amusement, and was rather horrified to notice she had grown so white that she looked for all the world as if she were about to faint.

"You know I thought he was in love with you and that you had refused him, as he ran off like that to England without saying good-by to any one. Well, he is coming back to Boulogne. And he asks most especially after you. Do you wish to see him again? Would you like me to ask him here? Don't be afraid of Tibby—she need never know!" And she laughed mischievously.

Yolande's heart beat so suffocatingly that she felt its throb must be audible across the brief silence that followed.

"Yes," she said; "I . . . I should like to see him again. . . ." The words sounded cold and formal.

The Marquise looked at her with her pretty violet eyes.

"But you mustn't fall in love with him, Yolande," she said; "he is a younger son, and the elder brother will have all the money. And you haven't got a *dot*, so that would make it even more difficult."

Yolande was saying to herself: "But he loves me—he loves me." She forgot to answer the Marquise.

"But I believe you are the magnet that has drawn him back to Boulogne," continued the Marquise. "Only don't forget what I've just told you."

"I will remember," said Yolande.

The sky and the sea had become blue again; the sun was shining with white glare upon the dunes. The pinetrees spread bows of ardent green against the sky. It was a beautiful world,

and the Châlet des Pins was surely the most beautiful place in it. For it was here that Gifford was coming back to her. How could she bear that meeting so long delayed, so passionately desired? Would not the joy of it kill her?

CHAPTER VII

“**A** MISS PASCOE? Charming, I am sure. By the way, who are the Pascoes?”

Lord Strode adjusted his monocle very carefully, and regarded his son with bland amusement in his piercing light eyes.

Who at the age of twenty-three, passionately in love and with the echo of loving vows still ringing in his ears, can endure not to be taken seriously? A man who has held the beloved woman in his arms resents being treated as a love-sick school-boy.

Gifford flushed to the roots of his crisped hair.

“They are—the Pascoes, I suppose,” he returned sullenly.

“*Bien entendu*,” said Lord Strode encouragingly. “What is her father?”

“He is Major Pascoe—I think he was in the Army.”

“Retired?” Lord Strode appeared to be docking these nice points in a mental category.

Gifford assented.

“And living in Boulogne, possibly for economical reasons?”

“I . . . believe so. . . .”

“In a *pension*, perhaps?” pursued Lord Strode, who liked to follow an attractive line of thought in detail to its logical conclusion. “One of those

charming little places with a view sideways of the sea?"

"Yes," admitted Gifford, his face growing every moment more sullen and gloomy.

"And the mother?"

"She's dead," said Gifford.

"*De Mortuis*," said Lord Strode generously. "Let us return to the father. He encouraged the affair, I take it—despite your tender youth which should have pleaded for mercy?"

"I never met him. I only saw him on the Plage. He did not encourage or discourage. I don't suppose he's ever heard my name!"

"Ah, you conducted the affair *sub rosa*?"

His tone of light irony flicked Gifford like the touch of a teasing whip. He was silent.

"What do you want me to do?" said Lord Strode.

"I want you to give me a decent allowance—enough to marry on. I want to settle down. I . . . I love Miss Pascoe. I want to marry her. And she loves me. Of course we cannot marry without money!"

"My dear Gifford," said Lord Strode, "I am sure that you did your very best to protect yourself from this young woman—and her attentions. Your masterly avoidance of her father does you great credit. I congratulate you. Although you have not always shown evidence of good taste as regards beauty and refinement, and so forth—I am willing to admit that you are making progress in prudence. Well, you are safely at home again. We will waive for the moment the desirability of your studying French. It seems

to be a task beset with quite unusual difficulties—and dangers. . . . You will, I hope, remain here for the present. While you are at home enjoying my hospitality you will not require even your usual allowance.”

“But father,” protested Gifford, “you don’t seem to understand. I have asked her to be my wife. She is waiting for me to go back! We are engaged. Can’t you understand this?”

“I understand so perfectly,” said Lord Strode, “that I am taking these precautions to ensure the pleasure of your company here for several months to come. Johnson” (Johnson was the old nurse now very aged and decrepit) “is, alas! too old to go about with you. I prefer to have you under my own eye.”

Gifford lost his temper and blazed out:

“You can’t do it! I’d rather starve in the streets than stay here! I’m going back to her, and we shall be married whether you give your consent or not!”

Lord Strode’s thin lips were set in a very pleasant line.

“Kindly leave the room,” he said. “I forbid you to speak to me like that.”

His cold, pale eyes gleamed dangerously. The look quelled Gifford more than the words. He was afraid of his father. Sullen with anger he turned and marched out of the room, the hot tears searing his eyes.

He went up to his own rooms at the top of the house. The valet had just finished putting away his things after unpacking them. When the man had gone Gifford sat down by the window. His

bedroom was at the back and looked over the Sussex Downs. He had always had the same room ever since he was quite a little boy. One could have traced the growth of Gifford from the store of possessions it contained. He kept his books there, too, and a huge bookcase contained nearly all he had ever possessed in the way of literature, ranging from the "Coral Island" and the "Alice in Wonderland" of his youth, to the latest and muddiest French novel. Of recent years he had been given the adjoining apartment for a study.

He had fifty pounds left. That would at least take him back to France. He longed more than ever to see Yolande again. Her beautiful presence would console him. He would defy his father and go back to her in spite of all things, and renew his passionate promises, and marry her. . . .

As he sat there, immersed in these thoughts, the door opened and his brother Reginald came into the room.

Reginald was about four years older than Gifford, and resembled his father in a very marked degree. Naturally extremely like him, he had sought to increase the resemblance by imitating him as closely as possible. He was a younger replica of Lord Strode, but Gifford considered him even more disagreeable and repellent and malicious.

"Hullo, Gifford! Turned up again? I hear you've been making an ass of yourself with a girl at Boulogne!"

Lord Strode had evidently lost no time in acquainting his favorite son with the details—as far

as he knew them—of Gifford's latest amorous adventure.

Gifford did not reply. He disliked his brother intensely, but, as a rule, he was prudent enough to avoid quarreling with him.

"I suppose you've written all sorts of d——d silly things to her?" continued Reginald suavely.

"That is my business. You're not the censor of my correspondence."

Reginald, unrebuffed, took a seat by the window opposite to his brother.

"I've come to see if I can do anything to get you out of the scrape."

"I'm not in any scrape," said Gifford passionately; "and if I were I shouldn't come to you for assistance!"

"I'm here at father's request," said Rex imperturbably; "he told me that you were in a very rude, unreasonable mood. He said he simply ached to box your ears!"

"I wish," said Gifford, "that you would go away and leave me alone."

Rex cleared his throat.

"Now do tell me all about this Pascoe girl, Gifford," he said. "Where on earth did you meet her in Boulogne? And will money keep her quiet? We're rather fed up with having your name in the papers, you know."

Gifford sprang to his feet. He clenched his fists; his face was crimson.

"Don't dare mention her, Rex! I forbid you to speak of Miss Pascoe! I forbid you to mention her name!"

Rex rose too. He did not quite like Gifford in this violent mood. As a rule, he was more sullen and gloomy than actively passionate. Just now he had looked as if he might have attacked him. The thought was incredible. He was a stronger and heavier man than Rex.

"Keep quiet, please," he said. "Try and discuss this reasonably. Father says he is quite prepared to——"

"We don't want his money! You can tell him so! We . . . we love each other! She has promised to be my wife."

"How much have you told her?" inquired Rex, unmoved by this fresh outburst of fury.

"I have told her—nothing. I am going to marry her. I don't care what any one says. . . ."

"Oh, yes—I quite understand. We have heard you say these things before. It's the very monotony that leaves us cold! But you forget how costly these things can be. Is she the kind of woman to open her mouth very wide?" His lips were parting in a singularly aggravating smile.

"I wish," said Gifford with fervor, "that I could close yours for good!"

"If you shout so, Lamorna will hear you," said Rex; "she's sitting in the garden. Or you will wake her brat, and then she will never forgive you."

Gifford's attention was momentarily turned from the subject in hand.

"I didn't know Lamorna was here," he said, "and I didn't know she had got a brat."

"A very important brat," said Rex. "He will be Lord Strode if you and I die without heirs. Lamorna is quite aware of his importance."

"As you are bent on staying here I think I will go into the garden and talk to Lamorna," said Gifford. "By the way, where's mother? I haven't seen her since luncheon."

"Probably lying down. You've upset the whole household," said Rex coolly. "But I shouldn't go and worry Lamorna if I were you. She has not properly got over Sydney's death—and then the birth of this posthumous son——"

"Oh, I see," said Gifford. "But you needn't be afraid. I shan't worry her. Lamorna was always a good sort."

He went whistling downstairs. Why had she not appeared at lunch? He liked Lamorna, and he was glad that she was staying at Merrywood. He thought he would go and talk to her, and perhaps presently tell her about Yolande and ask her advice and sympathy.

During that heated interview with his father, which had taken place almost immediately after luncheon on the day of his return home, Gifford had never had the courage to mention the fact that Yolande was a Catholic. There seemed, indeed, no reason why he should add anything gratuitously to the already sufficient sum of her entire unsuitability to mate with a member of the house of Strode. His grandfather, a statesman and a peer of the Victorian age, had left a special clause in his will to the effect that the estates were never to pass into Roman Catholic hands. The

motive for this had lain in the fact that he had had a younger son by his second marriage, who had become a Catholic as soon as he reached his majority, had entered the Society of Jesus, and had died a missionary in China. His name had been obliterated from the annals of the family; so great a disgrace had he in their eyes brought to a name so recently honored. This first Lord Strode had been a man of but one violent hatred, and that was directed against the Catholic Church. Neither money nor lands could thus pass into the hands of a Catholic. But beyond this solitary instance of Father John Lumleigh there had never been the least inclination on the part of any member of the family to jeopardize the said fortunes through religious caprice. Not that this disqualification on Yolande's part had constituted much of an obstacle in Gifford's eyes. He was the younger son, and he had never pictured himself as a possible future inheritor of the family honors. His inferior position had been impressed upon him always, all his life, by both his father and Rex. With his mother he was more of a favorite, but she was a meek mouse of a woman extremely gentle and tender-hearted, and she had never had the courage to take Gifford's part openly against the tyranny of her husband and son. So that he had always realized that he was a Nobody, while Rex was a Somebody. If he had ever shown any disposition to ignore the fact as a boy a sharp reminder had always been promptly forthcoming. Lady Strode wept in secret over the harsh treatment meted out to her bright handsome younger son; she saw

him grow up sullen, secretive, and bitter, and she was powerless to remedy these defects with the kindness and sympathy she longed to show him. She was afraid of her husband, and now she was almost as much afraid of Rex. And she was paying for her past timorousness by the fact that she had now completely forfeited Gifford's confidence. She had never dared openly to ally herself with him. When he had been very severely punished by his father as a boy she had never had the courage to interfere. She had suffered almost as much as he did from those cruel blows, yet she had never told him so.

She was a little, delicate, careworn woman, looking more than her fifty years. She had gentle blue eyes and mouse-colored hair, and a rather lined, sad face. Her spirit had been broken long ago. She had loved her husband once, but he had never loved her. She had a large fortune of her own, but it was all in his hands. She was alienated from her two sons. Thus she had lost even the prizes which fortune had intended should be hers. No woman had ever perhaps had so much and yet so little. All with her had turned to failure. All that was sweet had turned to bitterness. Lord Strode had consistently bullied her, as men will sometimes bully a naturally docile woman, and it had crushed her. There was no more unhappy woman in the whole of Merrywood than the great lady at the Place.

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. SYDNEY LUMLEIGH was staying at the Place when Gifford returned, although a headache had prevented her from being present at luncheon on the day of his arrival. She had been for about eight months a widow, and her baby son Robin was just six months old. He was her only child. She had married the cousin who stood next to Lord Strode's own sons in the matter of succession. Therefore, as the mother of Robin, she had recently been raised in Lord Strode's eyes to a position of some importance in the family.

She was still young, perhaps about twenty-four, and she was rather graceful and artistic-looking with quantities of soft brown hair, a densely white skin, and green eyes that were clear and shining as jewels. But she was not really pretty; her nose was blunt, her mouth large, and her cheek-bones were too prominent. It was believed that she intended at some future date to marry Reginald; but it was doubtful if he had ever observed her with anything but a critical and possibly condemnatory eye.

Her husband, Sydney Lumleigh, had been an artist, and his art had perhaps suffered, in spite of its courage, from the pervading decadence of the nineties. He had been a small, dark, delicate-

looking, bearded man, who looked like a Frenchman. He would use his hands in rapid and effective gesticulation. He painted unwholesome portraits of unwholesome-looking men and women; in his day he was considered revolutionary, but at the present time he might have suffered contempt at the hands of the Futurists. Such a marriage had brought out, crystallized, and confirmed all that was strange and unconventional in his wife. She was very delicate and she wrote—always on the sofa—tender and beautiful, if amorous, verses, such as were beginning to be fashionable in the early nineties. They were as decadent in their way as her husband's pictures, but they had a vogue, and in her own circle she had something of the authority of an ancient priestess. Her husband had adored the poet in her almost as much as he adored the woman. They both wished for a child, and yet Sydney had never lived to see his little son.

Lord Strode, who was of the type of cold, proud, conventional Englishman, disliked intensely those slim green volumes of verse—with a weird cover-design and frontispiece by Sydney—which yearly found their way, suitably inscribed, to the Place. He always hid them away at the back of the top shelves in his library. He wondered that Sydney should permit his wife to publish her feelings in this way. But then, he would remind himself, they belonged to a horrible, artistic, Bohemian set. Impressions are not easily erased, and he had once paid a visit accompanied by his wife to their house in Chelsea. The dimly-lit room was occupied by a number of un-

conventionally dressed men and very weirdly attired women, all grouped round Lamorna, who wore a shapeless white Greek garment and sandals. There were also present an unwholesome-looking man, who was said to be in a trance, and a lady-medium of redoubtable appearance. Lord Strode stayed exactly five minutes and refused all offers of refreshment. The episode had threatened to estrange him permanently from these cousins.

But Lamorna Lumleigh was *au fond* thoroughly worldly, and at her husband's death she quickly emancipated herself from this circle of friends. She wore the conventional attire of widowhood with scarcely a hint of the picturesque to mitigate its severity. With the advent of Robin the slim green volumes of verse ceased forever. She appealed to Lord Strode to help her with her affairs. An invitation to the Place for herself and Robin was gratefully and mournfully accepted. She quickly won the heart of Lady Strode, but not, it is to be feared, that of Reginald. Even in her deep mourning she was too peculiar-looking for his taste, and he disliked the color of her eyes. He preferred a simpler type. But, on the whole, the visit was proving a success. Lord Strode had a clannish feeling which made him welcome any one within reason who could claim kinship. And there was Robin. That was something which could not be overlooked, since Gifford's affairs always spelt disaster, and Reginald had never shown the slightest disposition to marry.

When Gifford advanced across the terrace

from the house he saw Lamorna sitting under the velvet-green shade of the superb cedar-trees, for which the Place was famous. She put down her book, and looking up, noticed his handsome gloomy, sullen face.

"What is the matter, Gifford?" she asked.

He stopped in front of her. Yes—he was certainly good-looking, but his expression was marred by ill-temper. She had gathered during her short stay that he was the Black Sheep, without which so few families can aspire to completeness.

"Everything's the matter," he answered sullenly. He sat down in a wicker chair piled up with soft cushions and leaned back in it. She felt that she would have liked to stroke his hair, caress him back into a good humor, as an indulgent mother will caress a fretful child.

"Do tell me!" she said, and smiled.

Her smile was much too wide for beauty; still, it was pleasant and kindly.

"I'm in disgrace," he said briefly.

"What, again?" said Lamorna.

He would have resented that "again" in any one else, but Lamorna was never malicious.

"Yes—again," he admitted.

There was silence. A twig dropped on the green and smooth turf; they both heard it fall, the silence of the summer afternoon was so deep.

"They're making a row because I want to marry a girl I met abroad," he said.

Mrs. Lumleigh's eyes were fixed upon him attentively, bright, glowing, jewel-like.

"Some one they think unsuitable?" she said in

the manner of one who hazards a tentative suggestion. She had known so many charming, interesting, wholly unsuitable people. Delightful people, whose standards differed so surprisingly from those of the orthodox conventional world, that she had been obliged to recognize regretfully that it was undesirable to bring the two camps into contact with each other. She, a deserter, looked back sometimes with longing upon those companions of former days. Poets who raved over her verses and recited them in strange venues. Journalists who wrote ecstatic reviews of those very verses. Long-haired musicians who literally sang her praises in strange songs dedicated to her.

"They'd think almost any one unsuitable," said Gifford, with a frown.

Mrs. Lumleigh felt a keen personal interest in this remark. Although she had loved Sydney very much, and did not love Reginald at all, she sincerely believed that it would be a good thing to marry him after a decent interval of mourning. She began to wish that Lord Strode had never seen her offering hospitality to a young man addicted to trances, nor to golden-haired mediums of dubious respectability. She wished, too, that she had been less generous in the distribution of those green volumes of verse, and that Sydney's art had adhered to the Millais convention.

"Oh!" she said a little startled. "But then Reginald has never given them any trouble in that way."

"He knows better," said Gifford sullenly; "of course, you know they want him to marry Cat?"

"Cat?"

"Lady Kathleen Purflete," he explained. "She and Rex don't care a hang about each other. But then it's so suitable!" He uttered the word in a tone of bitter mockery.

A faint color came into Lamorna's face. Cat was an unknown quantity. She had not realized that Lord Strode, having decided that Rex was now of an age to marry, had cast critical eyes upon the daughters of his neighbors and friends, and had singled out, not perhaps as the most suitable, but certainly as the least unsuitable, the girl who was known as Cat.

"Anyhow, she'd lead Rex a life—that is one thing in her favor," said Gifford.

"Do you know, you're dreadfully disagreeable and cynical?" she said.

Gifford laughed.

"Am I?" he said.

Her smile, her frankness, won him to good humor.

"But then I'm in love," he said, with more than a touch of self-contempt.

"I suppose she's very beautiful?" said Lamorna mockingly.

"Yes—she's beautiful," he admitted. He seemed to see her standing there upon the cliff, with the sun on her face; he could almost hear her say: "I was praying that you might love me. You see, I have been loving you for quite a long time." Such a grave, dignified utterance on those young lips. . . .

"Why is she so particularly unsuitable?"

"Well, she's got no money, and there's rather

a dreadful father—not the kind of person I could bring here. And I suppose she's been brought up rather anyhow. It's a wonder, considering all things, that she is such a little angel. She's very young—almost a child in some ways.”

“Tell me what she is like.”

“Very dark, with lots of silky black hair, parted and dressed very plainly, and big, rather sad brown eyes. She's tall—not as tall as you—and graceful, *très bien mise, très chic . . .*”

“She isn't French?”

“Oh no—both her parents were English. But she's lived in France nearly all her life—she hasn't been in England since she was a baby. Her father is a retired major, and she was born in India. Her mother's dead.”

Lamorna waited a moment. Then she said:

“You'll get over it. Wait a fortnight or three weeks and you'll find you've almost forgotten to think of her. You hardly know her. She cannot have made a lasting impression upon you.”

“She has,” he said; “I really do love her, Lamorna. Of course, I've imagined myself in love before, but it was never like this. I'm miserable away from her. I'd do anything for her—anything in the world. She cares for me, too. If I had money of my own I'd marry her to-morrow.”

“Is she an only girl?”

“Yes, and an only child.”

“And what does her father say to it all?”

“I haven't asked him,” Gifford reddened.

"Oh!" said Lamorna.

He fidgeted uncomfortably under her disconcerting gaze.

"I'm in a bit of a hole, you see," he said; "and what makes it all the worse is that she's a Catholic. I didn't tell my father that—it would only have added fuel to the flame!"

"But you are not behaving well to any one. Not to the girl—not to her father—not to your own people," she said quietly.

Lamorna began to feel her responsibilities as a mother quite keenly. If Robin should ever in the future come to her with such a story! . . . But it was inconceivable. Robin should be brought up to be incapable of such duplicity. She had heard that Lord Strode had treated his younger son very harshly, and she supposed this was the outcome.

"Oh—if *you're* going to begin!" he said almost rudely:

"So they've said all that to you?"

"My father's eloquence is extremely graceful and accomplished. And Rex reiterates him very prettily. They don't leave me with many illusions."

"But you shouldn't lay yourself open to it," she said. She was thinking to herself: "They despised poor Sydney, but he could never have behaved like that!"

Gifford got up. His face was flushed; he looked very near to tears.

"You seem to forget you're a Lumleigh," she said. She did not spare him. She felt she would have spoken just like that to Robin if he

had dared to come to her twenty years hence with such a story.

"I wish I could forget it!" he said violently. "You're just like the rest." He hunched his shoulders and began to move slowly away.

"Gifford—don't go away . . ." she said. When she chose her voice could be very charming. "Don't go away like that."

He came slowly back.

"You ought to go and tell her—and her father too—just what's passed here between you and your father."

"But don't you see it would mean losing her?"

"But you must be straightforward," she protested. "And if you can't marry her you'd better tell her so. How can you marry a Catholic? But perhaps you didn't tell her this? Perhaps you didn't tell her anything at all?"

She looked at him reproachfully. She made him feel mean, dishonorable. He said sulkily:

"You're right—I didn't. I didn't tell her anything at all. She knows who I am and that's about all. But we love each other." He fell back upon that assertion. Did anything else matter? . . . He added brutally: "You loved Sydney, didn't you? You ought to know what it means—this feeling that you'd go through heaven and hell for a person and never count the cost!"

His face was aflame. There was no doubt about the ardor of his love. He was ready to sweep aside all obstacles.

"You haven't told me her name . . ." she said more gently.

"Yolande Pascoe. It's a pretty name, isn't it?" He put this question almost shyly.

"Very pretty," she agreed.

"And you think I ought to go back and see her?"

His face cleared a little.

"Certainly I do," said Lamorna, "but don't be in too great a hurry. How long is it since you saw her?"

"It is nearly ten days. You see, I couldn't screw up courage to come home at once. So I stayed in London to make quite sure."

"I shouldn't keep her waiting too long, poor child," said Lamorna. A thin but sustained cry echoed from the upper windows of the Place. She sprang up quickly: "I hear Robin crying—I must go to him." She trailed towards the house. She was so supple she looked almost boneless. Gifford watched her with a kind of unwilling admiration.

In the hall she met Reginald.

"My baby boy's crying," she said, "I don't like him to cry."

Her maternal devotion was no pose but a devouring obsession. Reginald, however, misjudged her.

"Babies always yell, don't they?" he said, with a piercing look of his keen, pale eyes so like his father's.

"Yes, but mothers are there to find out why," she retorted.

Robin had taken the place of all the little books of verse. He was the Living Poem. But her poetical attitude towards life in general struck

Rex as singularly affected. Still . . . she was very charming, and he wondered what that cub Gifford had been talking to her about for more than an hour under the cedar trees. His latest silly love affair, in all probability. Fortunately his father had been very firm and had put a stop to it at once. One had to adopt strong measures with Gifford.

Robin was a beautiful baby, very strong, very healthy. . . . He was fair, with curly golden hair and big blue eyes; he was quite Saxon-looking. Lord Strode admired him immensely, and sang his praises in a way that was very gratifying to Lamorna. His unspoken thought was: "I wish Reginald would marry and give me just such a grandson!" He wondered that the small, dark, delicate-looking artist and the frail poet-woman who passed half her waking hours on the sofa, should have had such a fine sturdy normal son. He was glad to think Sydney had had the sense to appoint him joint guardian of the boy. He could have him educated in the way he wished, "without any nonsense." Fortunately Lamorna was agreeably complaisant in the matter; it was a pleasant reflection that she was so ready to bow to his superior wisdom. He still thought his own system of educating boys the only practical one. Plenty of rigorous discipline at home, and a good school at an early age. Emancipation from petticoat government as soon as possible. What a mercy he had so speedily checked that disposition on the part of his wife to spoil and indulge Gifford!

But this fresh outbreak of rebellion on Gifford's part had both angered and perplexed him. The girl was probably an adventuress, and Gifford, like an idiot, had fallen into her net.

Still it was disconcerting to discover that Gifford had left Merrywood Place that very night, and that France was his destination Lord Strode could not but guess. He contented himself with stopping his allowance; he knew the way to bring him to his senses! . . .

Gifford left home without making any farewells. He did not even say good-by to Lamorna, who was just then occupied with putting Robin to bed. He went to London and wrote the letter to the Marquise which followed her out to Terre Haute. Two days later he started for Boulogne.

Boulogne and Yolande. . . . He saw the town perched seawards, the rows of houses brown and gray, the clustered red roofs, the crowded harbor with its forest of masts and rigging, the Cathedral solemnly grand on the heights above the town, the gray dome delicately drawn against the sky. He was going back to her—perhaps he should see her that very day . . . he wondered how she would greet him in her pretty broken English. . . . But when the steamer slowly entered the harbor and he saw the Calvary looking down upon him from the heights, he turned and hid his eyes as if in shame. Conscience told him that he was going to hide things from Yolande which a man has no right to hide from the woman he intends to marry.

CHAPTER IX

THEY met first in the pine woods. Gifford had ordered his luggage to be sent on from Terre Haute and had elected to walk to the Châlet des Pins. Now that he was nearing his goal he felt a strange reluctance to see Yolande. He was coming to her outcast and empty-handed. Surely such a suitor would find no favor with Major Pascoe? He tramped the three kilometers in a mood of great despondency. He questioned his wisdom in coming at all. His journey home had been a complete failure. Full of these gloomy thoughts he entered upon the path which he was told by a passing peasant led through the woods to the Châlet. And he had not gone very far when he heard a light footstep, and looking up he saw Yolande quite alone coming towards him.

She flushed a little at the sight of him. She knew he was to come to-day, but he had not said at what hour he would arrive. She had gone for a walk to make the time pass more quickly. The Marquise was not very well and was prolonging her siesta that afternoon.

But it seemed to her when she saw Gifford that all must be well. He was even more dear to her than he had been that evening on the cliffs. When he came up and took her hand she trem-

bled a little. Soon there would be no more secrets, and she could tell every one—her father and Tibby and the Marquise—that they loved each other. She was sorry she had been cross with Tibby. No one had any right to be cross in a world that held so much gladness. She lifted beautiful dark eyes to Gifford's gray ones, and he, stooping a little, kissed her mouth.

Above them the pine trees spread boughs of dark lustrous green against the sky. Here and there they could catch glimpses of the white dunes—so luminously white in the sunshine—and the wide, blue, smiling sea. But Yolande saw nothing of pines or dunes or sea; she was aware only of her lover who had come back to her, who loved her still. It may be questioned whether she ever knew a happier moment than that one. They did not speak much at first. They kissed each other in rapturous silence. They felt alone in the world, in a beautiful and splendid isolation. She clung to Gifford. He had made her suffer, but that did not matter any more. He loved her—he had come back. . . . How silly and useless had been those bitter tears she had shed during the past fortnight! Later she would tell Gifford about them, and they would laugh together over her poor unnecessary little tragedy.

At last he released her. "So you are really here, my darling," he said; "it seems too good to be true. I could hardly believe it when the Marquise wrote and invited me, and said you were with her. But you haven't said anything to her, have you?"

He sounded the first note of anxiety, of alarm.

"No—I told her nothing, dear Gifford," she said. She had learned to think of him as Gifford, and the name came quite easily to her lips. "But now there will be no need of any more secrets, will there? We shall be able to tell papa and Tibby and the Marquise—every one." . . .

Gifford set his mouth sternly.

"Not yet, dear," he said, "we mustn't say a word about it yet. If the Marquise says anything about it to me I shall have to tell her that it is a secret. I must explain all that to you by and by."

"I would rather you told me now," she said; "I have hated having this secret. It made me rude and cross to poor Tibby—yes, I was simply horrid for several days, Gifford. It makes one commit such a lot of little sins—when one has a secret."

"My dear, you're not in the nursery," said Gifford; "you aren't obliged to tell Miss Tibbit everything. She is only your governess."

"Oh, but she is my friend too—she has been with me so many years. She isn't like a governess—I have always told her everything!" said Yolande.

"And your father? You didn't say anything to him?"

"Why, of course not. To tell you the truth, Gifford, I felt a little ashamed—after you had gone away. And Tibby, I think, guessed something. You see, I am not a good person to have a secret—I am so unaccustomed. Now tell

me your news. You have seen your father?"

"Yes," he answered grimly; "I've seen him!"

"And he is not—quite pleased?" Her voice was piteous now. "Is that what you have come to say?"

"You're not far out," he said bitterly. "We have quarreled as we have never quarreled before. And that's saying a good deal, my own precious little darling! He has stopped my allowance. I've got just fifty pounds in the world."

"Oh, but that is quite a large sum, surely," said Yolande gravely; "Papa and Tibby and I can live for quite a long time on fifty pounds."

What a child she was still—with a child's simple outlook!

"Oh, my darling Yolande—one cannot marry on fifty pounds!" he said; "I shall have to find something to do. I am not at all clever, and no one will pay me much at first. We shall have to wait. . . ."

He sat down on the sun-warmed slope, soft with pine-needles, and drew her to him. They sat thus, his arm around her, his eyes gazing into hers through the strange black fringe of lashes.

"But, of course, we will wait," she said, leaning against his shoulder with a little contented sigh. It was so good to have him back again—to know for certain that he really and truly loved her, that for the moment she was quite incapable of sharing his gloom. "I am only eighteen, you know, Gifford—that is still quite young, although many French girls marry even younger than that. But papa and Tibby will be

glad, I think, for me not to leave them so soon."

"I . . . I can't wait," said Gifford in an odd, strained voice; "I couldn't risk it. Some one else would come along and want to marry you. Some one richer and nicer than I. . . . No—we must be married very soon. I shall think of a plan. But you mustn't talk about it. That would be fatal. And you won't give me up now—just because I'm poor? You will marry me?"

"Yes—if Tibby does not think it too imprudent," she said.

The words chilled him.

"Tibby? What on earth has she got to do with it?"

"She has always had charge of me," said Yolande, "and she could tell me if it is wise or not for us to be married, when your father is so angry and refuses to give us any money."

"But that sounds most dreadfully mercenary, darling," he protested. "When you are in love you don't generally think about money."

"But indeed it is necessary to think about it a great deal when you wish to start even quite a little *ménage*. Marie Dourlay was married last year, and her parents would not permit it until they could find between them at least ten thousand francs a year. And I do not like debts, nor to have people bothering for their money. That happens, too, if you have not enough. Papa," she hesitated, fearing that such an admission might even sound faintly disloyal, "Papa does not always have enough. It . . . it is an uncomfortable thing. And sometimes, if people are rude, that is humiliating!"

So she had seen and known from personal experience that sordid, semi-disreputable life wherein debts and duns played their dismal part.

"It makes poor Tibby anxious and unhappy," she continued; "and I should not like it either, if I were your wife and had to look after the *ménage* and could not pay the tradespeople."

She looked at him with her grave serene eyes.

"Perhaps you do not realize these things, Gifford," she said gently, almost as if she were instructing a child.

This practical side of her nature astonished him. In these matters she seemed more experienced than he was. Debts meant with him a periodical flare-up with his father when, after many bitter and angry words and a scene that was altogether nerve-destroying, a cheque was generally grudgingly produced.

"If I were a French girl," continued Yolande, "I should not have to say these things to you. Papa would have decided if there was enough money. That seems to me such a much better plan."

"You adorable darling child!" said Gifford, kissing her. "If you were a French girl we should not be spending this perfectly lovely afternoon together in the pine-woods! Would that seem a much better plan too?"

Yolande laughed a low happy laugh. The golden afternoon, the dappled pattern of bright sunlight and purple shadows, the glimpses of white dune and blue sky and sea, held a strange glamour for her. She had wandered through these woods alone so often of late, and they had

never seemed so beautiful before. Always they had seemed a little sad and lonely; even the sighing of the trees, the faint murmur of the sea, had been touched with melancholy.

She turned to him suddenly.

"I was very unhappy when you were away," she said; "I was afraid you were not coming back. It made me restless and miserable, and I cried and could not sleep. . . . Then when the Marquise said you were coming I was very happy—I felt how foolish and wrong I had been to doubt you." . . .

"Darling," he said, inexpressibly touched by this naïve confession, "I hope you will always believe in me—always trust me. That will make things so much easier for us both."

"And your father," she went on timidly; "tell me about him. Was he very angry? And did that make you sad too? Papa has never been angry with me—I do not think I could bear it—and until the other day Tibby had never scolded me since I was quite a little girl."

"What did she scold you about?" he asked rather uncomfortably.

"It was a little bit on account of you," she said; "and she thought me idle, and I was really only *triste*. It was not a very bad scolding, you see. But I was angry and rather rude. Were you rude to your father, Gifford?"

"I daresay I was," said Gifford. "We both spoke very plainly. And my brother—I have one brother, you know, Yolande—was rather a beast too. I was glad to come away. I never want to go back to Merrywood."

"Merrywood?"

"That is the name of my home—Merrywood Place."

"Is it a large house?"

"Very large. Jacobean, you know,—and all that kind of thing. It's in Sussex."

She contrasted it mentally, and with a feeling akin to consternation, with the little *pension*—so much smaller than anything she had known before—which was all the Major could now afford.

"Then he is very rich—your father?" she asked.

"Very," said Gifford; "my grandfather made the money—the first Lord Strode."

"And you think he could not give us ten thousand francs a year—which is just enough for a simple little *ménage* like Marie's?"

"He could, but he won't," said Gifford; "he won't give me a penny. I tell you I've only got fifty pounds in the world."

Yolande looked very thoughtful.

"Would you not let me ask Tibby's advice?" she ventured, timidly.

"My dear child—we don't want advice. Of course you mustn't ask Tibby. If you do we shall certainly never be married at all."

He felt a little vexed with this unknown Tibby, whose influence was evidently so supreme. A Tibby, too, who dared to scold his beloved, and take her to task for idleness! . . .

When at last they rose and walked on to the *Châlet* they found the Marquise sitting alone, having tea under the trees. She looked up in

some surprise. Like many rather unconventional people she liked to be treated conventionally, especially by young men. Gifford had not announced the hour of his arrival, and here he was sauntering towards her accompanied by Yolande. Again a fugitive scruple seized her. Was she right in letting the young man come here at all? What were his intentions with regard to Yolande? She stood for the moment in *loco parentis* to the girl, and was in some measure responsible for her. She wondered how long they had been in the woods together.

Her greeting was a little stiff. But Gifford was almost always at his ease; he had far too much experience of delicate situations not to be perfectly aware how best to carry them off.

"I walked from Terre Haute," he said, "and I hope my luggage will arrive in due time. It was delightfully shady and cool coming through these charming woods. And on my way I had the good fortune to meet Miss Pascoe."

This perfectly plausible explanation appeased the Marquise.

"I hope you had an agreeable journey," she said. "Yolande and I both find the woods most shady to sit in. This is far nicer than the Falaise, is it not, Mr. Lumleigh?"

"Oh, you mustn't expect me to abuse the Falaise," he said lightly; "it was altogether delightful there. I found that I quite detested England when I went back to it!"

"I always detest England," said the Marquise, "although it is my own country. I have not been there for ten years. I said I would never go

again; but now I must confess I am actually contemplating it. I had an invitation this very day from a friend who wishes to see me. She is ill, and says she cannot live long—and I feel it would be an act of charity to go to her.” She gave Yolande a cup of tea, and began to pour out one for Gifford. “You are thirsty, I should think, after your walk?”

She looked from one to the other. Yolande was curiously radiant-looking; she had more color than usual and her beautiful dark eyes shone like stars. Was it Gifford Lumleigh who had called up that look into her face? The Marquise was extremely experienced in all matters of love. She felt perfectly convinced that some very definite understanding existed between these two handsome young people. She hoped, later on, that they would take her into their confidence.

“But you will not go to England soon, I hope, Marquise,” said Gifford a little anxiously. He did not wish to have these days at the *Châlet des Pins* cut short.

“Perhaps next week,” she said carelessly. “I have not thought a great deal about it. Do help yourself to cake and give Yolande some.” She leaned back lazily in her chair.

“Perhaps if I do go I shall take Yolande with me,” she continued, after a moment’s pause. “She has not seen England since she was a baby. Would you like that, Yolande?”

“I should love it, above all things!” Her face flushed a little; she spoke eagerly. More than ever, since she had known Gifford, had England

become for her the land of Romance—the land which from her earliest years she had dreamed of in connection with some strange and beautiful fate that would one day be hers. Perhaps it was there in some far-off and radiant future that she would become Gifford's wife. . . .

"It would compensate for leaving the pine-woods?" said the Marquise. She had no intention of being cruel; she only wished to tease this very reticent young couple.

"I love the pine-woods too," said the girl; "but I have always wanted to go to England."

"I daresay it can easily be managed," said the Marquise carelessly. Although Gifford said nothing, she felt that he did not care for the project; it did not appeal to him. And she longed to know why.

There was something she did not quite understand, something that still made her feel for Yolande's sake a little anxious. It was not that she did not like Gifford. He was the kind of young man whom women almost invariably like. But in spite of his frank and charming manner she could not help feeling that there was something secretive about him, something which he did not wish her to know. And she was not going to let him make Yolande unhappy. Perhaps he thought he could flirt with impunity with the daughter of Major Pascoe, whom he must know well, at least by repute. But she was going to show him that he could not flirt thus with the Marquise de Solignac's guest. If she had made a false move in permitting him to come here she could very soon cut the knot by bearing Yolande

off to England. She had heard that the father of this young man was unusually wealthy; therefore Yolande's absence of *dot* could scarcely be an insuperable disadvantage. But she did not know how little of the money would ever come into Gifford's hands. Neither his father nor Rex cared for him sufficiently to show him any particular generosity, and his mother's money had all been brought into settlement, and would belong principally to Rex in the future. His outlook was far less promising than she supposed.

CHAPTER X

BEFORE the Marquise had any opportunity of questioning Gifford upon the subject of Yolande she became ill with that affection which is known across the Channel as an *angine*.

Although it was not a very severe attack, it sufficed to keep her in bed for three days, and during that time she could only speak with difficulty, and preferred to remain quite alone in her apartment, ministered to by a faithful maid.

Gifford and Yolande were thus left completely to their own devices, and for once it must be said that Fate favored the lovers. The weather was brilliant; the pine-woods lost none of their glamour through pleasant familiarity; the lonely walks along the shore became to both of them adventures of thrilling happiness.

The only person who was thoroughly to be pitied was poor Tibby. She found Yolande's letters very brief and unsatisfactory. The girl, absorbed with her lover, could think of no trivial details of her daily life with which to interest Tibby. She wrote nearly always in the same strain. "The Marquise has a sore-throat. She is in bed to-day. I have been for a walk in the woods. The weather is beautiful, and it is lovely here." She did no justice to the lessons in composition which Tibby had imposed upon her for

eight years. The letters, too, were ill-written and bore evidence of hurry. What could she be doing there all day with the Marquise ill in bed? Surely she could find time to write a decent letter! Tibby's irritation was increased by the knowledge that the Major had so soon found Paris too hot for his liking that he had remained there but a single day. He had found, he said, a most delightful spot, where there were woods and a lake, a charming hotel, a casino, and many kindred spirits. She could not go and rescue him from these insidious dangers, since it is inconceivable that when a man is over fifty his daughter's governess should rescue him from any place, however undesirable. Nor could she go out to Terre Haute and see for herself what Yolande was doing. For the moment these two had escaped completely from her controlling hand. She was left alone during those stifling days in the Boulogne *pension*. She was very unhappy about Major Pascoe, and she was still more unhappy about Yolande. It was a misfortune that the girl should have attracted the capricious fancy of a woman like the Marquise, who was certainly very charming, but a thorough *mondaine*. Moreover, had she not quite recently allowed Yolande to walk home in the dusk from Villa Falaise to Boulogne with a young man of whom she—Tibby—knew nothing?

Had she been gifted with clairvoyance her anxiety would have increased into positive alarm. Even the Marquise herself was scarcely aware how unconventional was the behavior of her two young guests. She did not know, for instance,

of those hasty expeditions out to the dunes after dinner when the moon was just beginning to shine through the summer dusk, silvering those weirdly-shaped hillocks of blown sand until they looked like a miniature range of snow-crowned Alps. Against that silver-whiteness the pine-woods lay like purple-black shadows, strange, mysterious, and silent. The long, dark grass shivered and fretted under the rough caress of the sea wind. And the sea was more wonderful than ever in the moonlight, with every little crest rimming the low breaking waves as with a shining crown of silver. Its hushed music matched the sobbing of the pine-trees; all the night sounds seemed to possess a proud unconquerable melancholy that contrasted vividly with their own joy. And on the dunes or running upon the sands Yolande was like a little wild sprite. She would escape from Gifford, and he would chase her; she would turn abruptly and elude him, and then run towards him till he clasped her in his arms. She was like some slender and fragile flower in the moonlight. And neither of them spoke of the future. This was the present wherein they could be happy together. Gifford put off the day of reckoning. He told himself that she loved him too much now ever to give him up. With every kiss she seemed more his.

She liked to stand and watch the fishing-boats pass by at night, their lights shining; with their heavy sails they seemed to her like dark and mysterious birds. Sometimes a yacht passed with shining silver sails, bright in the moonlight, a fairy argosy laden, perhaps, with a magic freight.

She told Gifford of her childish dreams of another barque crossing that sea in a sheet of burning flame, bearing a statue of Our Lady to the harbor of Boulogne. And though he laughed a little, he was touched, too, by the beauty of the childish thought. He never saw again quite that wilful, wayward, yet poetic side of her. It seemed called into being by those marvelous June nights that were never quite dark. She was like a spirit of the dunes, almost intangible, fragile as sea-foam. . . . When they returned to the Châlet, going quickly as if they had played truant too long, he noticed that she was always spent and tired. More willing, too, to lean on his arm, yet more timid and shrinking when he would have kissed her.

"We must be married very soon, my Yolande," he said to her one night as they walked back to the Châlet.

A sudden storm had swept up from the sea, stirring the waves to swift revolt; the pines were tossing dark stencilled boughs against a sky of hurrying purple cloud.

"Must we?" she said. The present was so perfect that she had ceased to think of the future; she had almost forgotten to fear the time when Gifford would have to go away and leave her.

"But of course we must," said Gifford; "and if you do go to England with the Marquise we could arrange something."

"Do you mean we could be married there?" Was it in England she was to be Gifford's bride, dressed as Marie Dourlay had been in white satin with a wreath of orange-blossoms?

"Yes—I think we could be married there," said Gifford.

"You think if I were to be presented to your father he might give his consent?" she said earnestly. "You would take me to this place, Merrywood?"

Gifford looked puzzled; he passed his hand over her hair, that seemed so thick and soft to his touch.

"Darling Yolande—I haven't thought of all the details yet. It will be a little difficult, and the less we talk about it to others now the easier it may prove to be. You must trust me, and I will arrange as best I can." He sighed.

"You're not happy, dear Gifford?" she said wistfully.

Out there on the moon-washed sands he had seemed gay and light-hearted as a boy. Perhaps the sudden angry storm had depressed him. She put out her hand and touched his timidly.

"What would you do if I went away and left you, Yolande?" he said anxiously. "Would it make you sad? Would you mind very much?"

He put his hands round her face and turned it towards his own. He looked into her eyes with a strained, eager look. "Tell me," he said.

But she broke from him, and, turning, hid her face. He heard a low sound of sobbing; it tore his heart. Her whole slight body quivered. She sobbed almost as if she were struggling for breath. He was on his knees beside her in an instant. "Yolande . . . Yolande." . . .

If she would only speak! That dry, agonized sobbing was unbearable. . . .

"Yolande," he said again.

"Gifford—of course I should care. I think it would kill me. I love you——"

He held her closely, kissing the tears from her eyes.

"And I love you," he said. "I can't give you up now, darling. Bad or good, we must make the best of it. But you mustn't cry, Yolande. . . . I'm not worth one of your beautiful tears!"

It was their last evening of freedom, for on the morrow the Marquise reappeared, having recovered from her *angine*, and looking more lovely than ever.

"Well, you two children," she said, as she came in to breakfast, "have you been amusing yourselves and each other?"

"Yes, thank you, Marquise," said Gifford; "it would be quite impossible to be bored in this lovely *châlet*. But, of course, we have missed you very much."

"Well, I am not at all enamored of my lovely *châlet*," said the Marquise, who always detested a place the moment she was ill in it. And she had felt very sorry for herself during the last few days. Quite evidently *Terre Haute* did not agree with her. The plan of going to England to visit her sick friend had taken definite shape during those days of imprisonment.

She turned to Yolande.

"How pale you are looking, child! I've written to your father about your coming to England with me. He's quite delighted, of course. He

says he shall take advantage of your absence to remain away from Boulogne himself."

"Oh, when shall you go?" said Yolande eagerly.

The Marquise smiled.

"Probably Monday," she said; "that will give us three days to prepare. And you—Mr. Lumleigh, I suppose you intend to remain in Boulogne to study French?"

"Certainly not," he said; "I shall escort you both to England."

"Has Boulogne ceased to attract you?" she inquired.

Under her cool scrutiny Gifford reddened.

"Not altogether, but it would be a desert without you, Marquise, and without Miss Pascoe."

He spoke in a tone of easy conventional politeness.

"My poor friend is in London," she said; "and she has taken a flat for me not too far away, so that I can easily go and see her. I particularly requested that there should be a room for you, Yolande, and since your father is so kind as to let you come I think we may look upon it all as quite decided."

"That will be delightful," said Gifford; "I shall stay for a bit in London too. We must go to the opera and to the play, and to Hurlingham and to all the other agreeable places which Miss Pascoe has never seen."

He was so open and frank about it all that again he quieted her misgivings. Yolande certainly looked very happy—not at all like a girl

who has begun to wonder if she is loved or not. There were generally such moments for the woman in every love-affair, and that they could be bad moments the Marquise was well aware. Yolande was, however, bright and gay as a child. Was she so certain, then, of Gifford's love? Had he already spoken? And if so, why had she herself not been told? These were puzzling questions. But Yolande was not her own daughter, and she felt a little different about interfering.

CHAPTER XI

THE waters of the Channel, though by no means in a bad humor, were yet sufficiently animated on the day they crossed to cause the Marquise acute discomfiture. Before she set foot on English soil her dislike of that accursed island, as she called it, had deepened into violent hatred. At one moment she found herself doubting whether she would ever find courage to return to France. La Manche looked a trivial insignificant blue streak upon the map, and she felt that never again would she be able to put any trust in maps. They were quite enormously delusive and misleading. An hour and a half? She felt that she had spent æons of anguish in that unhappy prison of a deck cabin while her maid ministered to her sufferings. Other captives could be heard uttering screams of dismay and agony. Altogether it was a very painful and disagreeable experience, and she wondered how Yolande was enduring it. She need not have made herself unhappy, however, on Yolande's account, for Miss Pascoe was seated happily on deck talking to Gifford Lumleigh. Further, she was making the discovery that she adored being on the sea. Even her brief farewell of Tibby on the quay at Boulogne had not diminished her gaiety. She had kissed her and

tried to comfort her, for Tibby was actually in tears, but she had never mentioned Gifford's presence on the boat. That would only have renewed Miss Tibbit's reluctance to allow her to go to England without any other chaperonage than that so inadequately offered by her beautiful hostess. Besides, she knew nothing of Gifford's return to France; of the long golden days spent with him at the *Châlet des Pins*, and of the long moonlit evenings passed upon the white dunes with their fringe of blue pine-woods, their thin scrub of wild myrtle and tamarisk. Yolande had lost something of her first scruple in concealing her love-affair from Tibby. She felt that she owed her loyalty in a new quarter. Gifford had entreated her to trust him and to keep silence; she took pride in obeying him; it was the practical and definite sign of her complete allegiance to him, her devoted love for him. It had, however, been a little humiliating that to achieve Tibby's ignorance of his presence, Gifford had had to hide until the boat had started. It gave Yolande the same sense of guilt and shame as when the waiter had presented her so slyly with Gifford's first letter. These things were soiling. But she consoled herself that they were all part of the sacrifice he demanded of her.

"Our dear Marquise is very unhappy," said Gifford, settling himself beside her and drawing a thick rug over her knees. "One would think she had never traveled before. I refuse to believe in those voyages to America and Ceylon."

"I suppose the boats are so much smaller and shake more," said Yolande. She was not think-

ing really about the Marquise. Her eyes were fixed upon the fading French shores, lying bathed in sunlight. High above the town she could see that green dome of the Cathedral, dominating the scene. She thought that it stood there with an air of protection as if God were indeed watching over the town, preserving it from harm. Almost she had a vague regret at leaving Boulogne. This voyage did not mean only a little visit to England; it was the journey to which she knew now that she had looked forward all her life. She knew, too, that that future was to be intimately bound up with the man at her side. There were, of course, those difficulties of which he had spoken, but perhaps he would find employment and earn enough to have a tiny *ménage*. She was sure that she could in time become a good manager, that she would learn to be economical. She was glad now that Tibby had been so firm about teaching her to cook and sew. She had hated these tasks, and had often longed to rebel, but now she was grateful to Tibby. She was a little afraid that lately she had not been always kind to Tibby. She had neglected her. But when she was married she would soon make amends. She would ask her to come and stay with them. It would be delightful to play hostess to a Tibby who could no longer even kindly scold her!

"What are you thinking of, my dearest dear?" said Gifford suddenly breaking in upon her thoughts.

She colored faintly. "I was thinking perhaps when we are married, Gifford, we could have

Tibby to come and stay with us. I should like her to see what a good manager I am. You know I believe she still looks upon me as a very useless little girl! And, then, you don't know Tibby, and I want you to love her too."

Gifford's face hardened.

"Oh, but I don't think I shall want her at all," he said; "I should hate to have any—outsiders. I want to have you all to myself."

"But Tibby isn't an outsider," she protested; "and we cannot always be quite alone for, of course, papa would want to come and see me. It is strange to think, Gifford, that though we are going to be married you have never seen either papa or Tibby—the two people who really matter to me."

"I don't think it's so very strange," said Gifford; "you see, the Marquise is responsible for introducing us; and, then, your father has been away from Boulogne. I am afraid I can't think much of Miss Tibbit's rights in the matter. She is only your governess, and I should have thought you would have been only too pleased to shake off any one so strict and severe and tiresome!"

"Oh, but she has always been very kind to me. People used to say she spoilt me. And if she scolded me I am sure that I deserved it. It is only you who think I am perfect, Gifford. Tibby and papa must know of many imperfections."

"Well, it isn't any more strange than your not knowing my people, I suppose," said Gifford; "such things happen every day—marriages which one's relations know nothing about. Family ties

always seem to me a little absurd directly one is grown up. One's people only seem created to make a fuss over trifles that don't concern them." His face assumed the old sullen lines. "I am sure we shall find a way to be married quite privately in London. Even the Marquise needn't know. Oh, I feel as if the whole world were conspiring to prevent our happiness—I hardly like to breathe it aloud lest some hidden enemy should place obstacles in the way of it!" He spoke vehemently.

"But do you think the priest would marry us without my father's consent?" she said timidly.

"What priest?" said Gifford frowning.

"The priest we shall ask to marry us," she answered.

Gifford's eyes were fastened upon the white cliffs of England that were now clearly visible in all their details against the pale, cloudless blue of the June sky.

"I don't think we shall be able to be married by a Catholic priest, Yolande," said Gifford; "he'd want to ask too many questions—especially as I'm not a Catholic. It would add very greatly to our difficulties. No—I hardly think that would be possible."

Now Yolande was not in those days an extremely pious girl. In after years her religion became a far more absorbing thing to her. So far she had taken it simply and very much for granted. In Boulogne, where her few friends were generally both French and Catholic, she had never met with the slightest antagonism, and she had heard nothing of religious discus-

sion. She and Tibby had gone to Mass most days together. With the Marquise de Solignac she went only on Sundays. The Marquise was one of those people who, without being at all devout, are nevertheless assiduous in performing all that is obligatory, and she had been careful to ascertain that her daughter's husband was a practising Catholic. Still, if Yolande was not very devout she was, at any rate, well-instructed, and she knew perfectly well that as a Catholic she must be married by a priest in a Catholic church. She would yield to Gifford's superior wisdom in everything else, and already she felt that she had yielded in things her conscience did not altogether approve. But on this particular point she knew that he could not make her give way. She could not return to Boulogne with such a story as that to tell to Tibby. It was quite impossible. So she only said very quietly:

"Then we shall not be able to be married, Gifford. I know it would be a sin for me to be married in any other way. About the other things you are making me do—this keeping papa and Tibby in the dark—I am not so certain, because I have not had the opportunity of consulting my confessor. But I do know this would be wrong, and I cannot do it. It would be a sin for me."

"A sin—what nonsense!" said Gifford scornfully. "Who says it is a sin?"

"It is a sin because it would mean that I must disobey the laws of the Church," she said.

"I didn't think you were so priest-ridden," he said; "in England you'll find people very free from that kind of nonsense!"

But he was uncomfortably aware that at last he had touched something which was rocky and would not yield to his easy sophistries. He had adored her when she told him about her dream of the Madonna; he had liked to see her kneeling at the foot of the Calvary; it had touched him inexpressibly to know that she had been praying for his love. But now he found himself up against obstacles that were all part of her religion, and which he felt might render it as hateful in his eyes as it had been in the eyes of the first Lord Strode, who had so unwillingly given a son to the Society of Jesus. Again the remembrance of the impossibility of introducing a Catholic wife to his parents struck him with renewed force. He had not suspected Yolande of so much bigotry, of so much tenacity. He had hoped that as she was so young and inexperienced she might still be in ignorance of the precise teaching of the Catholic Church on the subject of marriage. He was annoyed to find that she had been perfectly instructed upon this point. It did not make his path any easier, rather it increased its difficulty and also the urgent necessity for keeping silence until after the ceremony.

He traveled with them to Charing Cross, and the Marquise being with them he had no opportunity of continuing the discussion begun on the steamer. At the station he bade them both farewell. The Marquise gave him her address and invited him to dine on the following evening. He gladly assented. In the meantime he was resolved to lose no time in making definite plans for their marriage as soon as possible.

CHAPTER XII

IT seemed to Gifford that Fortune was exceedingly propitious to him during the weeks that followed. He saw a great deal of Yolande while the Marquise generally spent most of the day with her dying friend, Mrs. Vernon, to whom she was singularly attached. Mrs. Vernon was about her own age, but had early been stricken with an incurable malady, and her days were now numbered. She was a widow and had no children, and until lately she had spent a great deal of her time in France, and before her illness had even accompanied the Marquise upon some of her longer journeys. They were extremely intimate, and the Marquise when she chose could be a very faithful friend. If Elsie Vernon wanted her, nothing would keep her from her side. It was perhaps the most profound attachment of her life, and she felt the prospect of parting from her with a real grief. Mrs. Vernon was a courageous woman and was facing her inevitable fate with a calm courage that seemed to forbid any excessive display of emotion. The Marquise spent long hours in her sick-room, but in the evenings she was not unmindful of the duty she owed to her little guest, and she was always ready to dine out and go to any play or opera or other entertainment which Gifford might sug-

gest. Mrs. Vernon had even urged her to do this.

Thus three weeks passed very happily for the young couple, and the Marquise in no way intruded her own grief and anxiety upon them. Gifford's attachment to Yolande showed no sign of diminution, and although the Marquise had now resolved not to force their confidence, she began to take it for granted that they were engaged to each other, and that for reasons best known to themselves they wished to keep the fact a secret for a little longer.

Gifford had had for some time a bachelor apartment in Jermyn Street, but he knew that he would soon have to give it up. Failing his allowance he had not a sou in the world except his fifty pounds, upon which, however, he had already made considerable inroads. It would last with care over the honeymoon, and then he would either seek employment or inform his mother privately, hoping that she would be able to give him some assistance. He was always hopeful and optimistic, and he felt that once safely married to Yolande all would turn out well.

One day, however, matters came to a crisis. The weather was now very hot, and Mrs. Vernon was suffering extremely from the heat. At all costs her physician decided that she must leave town, and it was rather suddenly arranged that she should go to Bournemouth and that the Marquise should accompany her. The end could not be far off, and it was thought that this plan might add to the comfort of her last days, or at least di-

minish the discomfort she was now experiencing. The Marquise had a moment of difficulty on Yolande's account. Then she suddenly thought that, after all, the girl had been three weeks in town; the season was waning, and it would be quite easy to send her back to Boulogne. She knew that Yolande would be much disappointed at this precipitate termination to her visit; still it could not be helped. She was obliged to think first of her dying friend, whom she could not possibly leave. And it was equally impossible to take Yolande with her to Bournemouth.

She broke the news quite kindly to her on the day the plan was first arranged.

"Yolande," she said (she was alone with her at the time, as for once Gifford was not dining with them), "I'm afraid I shall have to send you home on Saturday. I have to go with Mrs. Vernon the day after to-morrow to Bournemouth. You won't mind being here one night by yourself? I shall leave Jeanne with you so that you will not feel alone."

Yolande looked up quickly. "Oh, must I really go home?" she said in a tone of consternation. The unwelcome news had taken her completely by surprise. And what would Gifford say? The thought of parting with him was like a cold hand laid suddenly upon her heart, numbing it. Involuntarily the tears gathered in her eyes; she was afraid that the Marquise would perceive them, so she rose and looked out of the window, pretending to be interested in the ceaseless traffic of the street below.

"Do you really mind so much?" said the Mar-

quise. "You would have to go soon, in any case. I don't think," and now she looked at her with a straight, keen glance, "that you should delay announcing your engagement. Your father ought to know. I do not know if you have already told him, but I have certainly felt a little hurt that you have not told me."

Yolande was silent. What could she say in loyalty to Gifford?

"For I conclude you are engaged to Gifford Lumleigh," continued the Marquise; "or else I do not think I should have accorded you so much liberty. But in England people who are engaged are allowed to go about together in a manner which would, of course, be unheard of in France. I am not sure that it is wiser but it is the custom."

"He wished to keep our engagement a secret," said Yolande, "that is why I did not tell you. His father does not approve, and until he gives his consent there will not be any money. So he thought it would be more prudent to keep silence for the present."

"So you haven't told your father?" inquired the Marquise in rather an astonished tone.

"No," said Yolande, feeling very uncomfortable.

"Nor Tibby?"

"No." She felt that the Marquise shared her own misgivings as to the rectitude of so much secrecy, and her conscience again became a tormenting inquisitor.

"Well, I should certainly tell them both the moment you get home, my dear child. After all,

Major Pascoe is your father, and he has a right to know. You are very young, you see, and you have so little experience of the world. And if Lord Strode refuses to give his son an allowance it would be most foolish and imprudent to continue an engagement of the kind."

She got up and kissed Yolande as if she wished to soften the severity of her speech.

"I am sorry that I shall not see Gifford again myself, for I should certainly have spoken to him on the subject. He has no right to bind you—young as you are—to a secret engagement!"

She felt, then, what an impossible parent Major Pascoe must be, and what a hopeless, useless guardian for a young girl. He did not seem to bother his head about her at all. He left her to Tibby, and the girl was too old to have a governess. She was lamentably unprotected.

"I'm sure you'll do what is right in the matter, my dear," she said, her great violet eyes softening with tenderness, for Yolande was becoming very dear to her. "Take the advice of an old woman who has had a daughter of her own to bring up." And she kissed her again. Yolande returned the embrace rather shyly. She was still hiding so much from her. She had not ventured to tell her that Gifford was making plans for their marriage to take place before she even left England. Perhaps it would now be the day after to-morrow. Instead of returning to France on Saturday they might be quietly married. She felt a little afraid now that it had come to the point, especially after what the Marquise had just said. It could not be right—that she should go off and

get married without telling a soul, although Gifford assured her that it was done every day. The Marquise seemed to think it wrong to keep the engagement a secret, and she had openly blamed Gifford for insisting upon it. And if it were wrong to say nothing of the engagement to her father and Tibby, how much more wrong it would be to get married without telling them! . . .

"It is from our point of view the best thing that could have happened," said Gifford.

He had come in on the afternoon before the Marquise's departure for Bournemouth, and Yolande had announced the change of plans to him with a little secret fear. What would he say? What would he do? She stood there facing him like a pale little flower—a flower fashioned of white foam and whiter flame. . . .

He took her in his arms when he said that: "It is the best thing that could have happened . . ." and kissed her with a new gentleness. "My Yolande," he said, "my darling little bride to be! Nothing can stop us from getting married on Saturday. I have got a special licence, and if you must be married in your own Church I must go and see about it this afternoon."

Yolande drew her fine black brows together in a puzzled frown.

"Oh, Gifford, are you quite sure that we ought to do this? The Marquise seemed to think it wrong already that we should have kept our engagement secret—that I should have not told papa and Tibby."

"Then why on earth did you tell her that we were engaged at all, Yolande?" he demanded, with a touch of temper.

"I could not help it—she asked me. And she said it was wrong of you to bind me to a secret engagement."

"Oh, she blamed me, did she?" said Gifford. "I never thought she would be so interfering. Well, anyhow, she's going away, and I'm glad of it. It's really, when you come to look close at it, quite providential."

She was silent.

"What is the matter with you, Yolande? You don't look at all pleased! You are not hesitating, are you? You do want to marry me?"

He took her hands, grasping them tightly, and looked into her eyes.

"I . . . I don't want to do anything wrong, Gifford. Couldn't we go back to Boulogne and tell papa . . . and ask his permission, and be married there?"

She tried to release her hands, for she felt that his very touch weakened her; but he held them firmly.

"What is your father to you?" he said, almost with anger. "At least I am as good a guardian for any woman as he is! He is nothing but a gambler—a *roué*—with no sense of parental responsibility. Do you suppose I haven't heard all about him in Boulogne? Half the time he is too fuddled with absinthe to know what he is doing! Is he the kind of person to advise you? He is impossible—and if you let him come be-

tween us you will simply put a stop to everything. And what will your future be as his daughter in Boulogne? The child of a man no decent person cares to know! Do you wish to go back to him, Yolande? Do you wish to break off our engagement? Answer me!"

There was a kind of fierce vehemence in his tone as he uttered these harsh words. Yolande felt as if he were deliberately tearing her cherished idol from its pedestal and disclosing the feet of clay. And he had told her that this was common knowledge. She was the only person still in ignorance of her father's real character. She had never, thanks to Tibby, had the slightest knowledge of it, nor of the money flung so recklessly away at the gaming-tables of Europe, nor of the brain dulled by absinthe-drinking. And she knew by instinct that it was true. It explained so many things to her that had been mysterious and unaccountable. It explained the fact that she had so few friends of her own age, and that the French people in Boulogne did not care for her to associate with their children. It was all true, but until now no one had had the courage to tell her.

She wrenched herself free, and flung herself trembling and sobbing upon the sofa, her face hidden from him. "You are cruel . . . you are cruel!" . . . she cried passionately; "and it is not true—my father has always been kind and good, and my mother loved him! He is not what you say. You do not know him—you have never seen him!"

"I have seen him," replied Gifford calmly;

"and every one knows the kind of man he is. If you prefer life with him to anything I can offer you, by all means go back to him. As it is, I can promise you he will be only too thankful to get you off his hands!"

He was merciless now. He recognized that this was the last struggle, and he was determined to use every weapon that suggested itself. He was pitiless, as the Strodes were always pitiless when they were thwarted. Yolande looked up and encountered his hard and angry eyes, blazing like twin flames.

"I have given in about the Church," he said, "but I am not going to give in about anything else. Make your choice now. If you love me—as I believe you love me—put these absurd scruples out of your mind. Trust yourself to me." His voice suddenly softened and he stooped over her. "Yolande—darling—beloved—you are so alone, and I need you so much. Let us be happy together. . . . Remember when you knelt on the steps of the Calvary and prayed for my love. You have it now in full measure—don't throw it away." . . .

He bent down lower, and turning her face to his put his lips to hers. "I love you," he said; "don't let anything stop our marriage now. Never fear that I shall not make you happy, Yolande. My whole life shall be spent for you and your happiness." . . .

She dragged herself to her feet.

"You have taken everything away, Gifford," she said in her cold grave way, "I seem to have only you left. I think it was very cruel of you,

but perhaps you were right to tell me the truth. No one has ever had the courage to tell me about papa before. It has hurt me—just now I thought I could not live for the pain. But you are right—I will marry you on Saturday. I . . . I feel so alone.” . . .

“I had to tell you,” said Gifford; “I couldn’t let you ruin your life and mine for any one so worthless. I had to tell you,” and he tried to soften the harshness of his words with renewed caresses. “Now I am going to see the priest.”

“And I shall have to see him, too, later,” said Yolande; “you know I must go to confession before I am married. One must not approach any of the sacraments unless one is in a state of grace.”

He smiled. “And are you not in a state of grace, my little angel darling?” he said.

“Oh, but I have not been to confession for quite a long time,” said Yolande; “more than a month, I think.”

Gifford kissed her.

“Well, I must be going now, you dear little saint,” he said; “and I will come in this evening, and tell you the time of the wedding.”

The word made her start a little.

“My wedding!” she said, “you know I can’t believe it, Gifford. It doesn’t seem quite like one, does it?—since I have no wedding-dress and no presents—not even a cake.” She laughed.

“No—I’m afraid I’ve deprived you of everything a bride ought to have. Still, it’ll be awfully nice having it quite quiet without any fuss. A man nearly always looks such a fool on

his wedding day. Where shall we go to afterwards, Yolande?"

"Oh, you must choose," she said; "you see, I don't know any places in England. You will perhaps be able to think of a nice quiet one that will suit us." And she looked at him with grave serene eyes. All signs of that passionate grief of disillusionment had left her face; she was again the little white flower, fragile, delicate, solitary and withal so womanly.

Gifford was always plausible, and perhaps he had never in his life been quite so plausible as he was during his interview with a very simple and unsuspecting priest that afternoon. He left nothing to chance, and had learned from a book exactly the nature of the questions which would be put to him. He was therefore quite ready with his answers. The impression he left upon the priest was that he was a very charming and frank young fellow. He depicted Major Pascoe with a degree of blackness which he scarcely merited, describing the loneliness of Yolande's position, friendless and unprotected; he exhibited a straightforward desire to rescue her from most undesirable surroundings, and expressed his willingness to permit her to practise her religion, and to have any possible children of the marriage baptized and brought up as Catholics. It ended by the priest agreeing to obtain the necessary dispensation for their marriage to take place.

She was alone when he came to fetch her on

Saturday morning at an early hour, when half fashionable London was still in bed and asleep. She was sitting in the drawing-room, wearing the white embroidered dress of Tibby's fashioning in which he had first seen her. She thought perhaps Tibby would like to know later on that she had worn this dress on her wedding day.

Gifford bent down and kissed her. To his surprise he saw that she was crying; the tears fell thickly, swiftly.

"Darling—what is it?"

She made an effort to choke back her tears.

"It is the secrecy of it all. I wish papa and Tibby knew. Whatever he has done—whatever he has been—he is my father, and he has always been very kind to me." . . .

"Oh," he said almost impatiently, "I do wish you wouldn't go over all that old ground again. When once you are my wife we shall very soon be able to tell the whole world."

"But I have scruples—I cannot believe it is right. What did you tell the priest, Gifford?"

"I explained my position—and yours—very fully to him. I found him very sympathetic. He saw the dangers to which you were exposed—through having such a father. Now are you ready, darling? We shall be late."

There were in those days of the early nineties neither taxis nor motors plying in the London streets. A sedate-looking brougham took the young couple to church. Gifford looked defiant and tremendously alive—just as he had done on the day when she had first seen him at the Villa Falaise. His pale, handsome face, with the

crisp and rather tawny hair, was set and stern; his gray eyes blazed with a strange fire. Even now he feared that his father might be having him watched, or that some one might yet step in and frustrate his purpose. All through that drive he held her hand in his. They scarcely spoke at all. The morning was gray and rather cold, and Yolande shivered a little in her thin muslin dress. She loved him, but to-day there was something about him that made her afraid too. He was so much her master. He was so capable of enforcing his will upon her. All the time she was thinking: "What would Tibby say?"

She remembered that Tibby had not liked him. And for the first time she began to tell herself that she knew him so little. She had never seen any of his people. They were intimate, but their lives, their surroundings, were strange to each other. The waves of love had borne her so swiftly into his arms, and in another hour she would be his wife. If there were really such harsh and desperate need for secrecy on account of Gifford's father, she could still divine no reason for keeping her own father in the dark. Why had she been compelled to keep this irremediable step she was about to take from him and Tibby? Why had she tamely submitted to Gifford's wishes in the matter? It seemed wholly wrong that she should be driving thus to church with her future husband, instead of being escorted thither by Major Pascoe. But it was too late to remedy this. She was there, and Gifford was holding her hand so tightly that it

hurt her, and she was glad of the pain because it served to distract her thoughts. And after all—she loved him. She had loved him from the first hour of their first meeting. She remembered the restless misery of those days when he went home to Merrywood Place. The sleepless nights when his face had haunted her, and she had the fear that he had gone away never to return. Now he was to be hers always. Yet the price she had paid seemed to her in those last moments a heavy one. No one must know—no one must be told—just as if they were doing a guilty and shameful thing in marrying each other. Least of all was she to tell the two people who loved her and desired her happiness. Gifford had smirched the faces of her idols, had spoken with violence of her father, with contempt of poor Tibby. And she had always loved Tibby—Tibby, who had been the one to teach her and caress her and forgive her for eight long years; Tibby who had taken the place of that never-known mother.

. . . They were at the church door. The priest was there already, waiting for them. Two witnesses were present. The brief little ceremony was soon over, the ring was on her finger, the words had been uttered that made her Gifford's wife forever . . . forever. . . .

His face was white to the lips; he held his head in a defiant way; his eyes were blazing. She almost felt, as she timidly looked at him, that he had the aspect of a man who is undergoing secretly some subtle torture. Yet she could not

meet the look in his eyes . . . so triumphant—so passionate . . . through all its suggestion of pain. . . .

As she signed the register her glance happened to fall upon Gifford's signature which was still wet. He had written somewhat indistinctly, and had put only "John Denis Lumleigh." His father's name was entered simply as John Lumleigh. There was no mention of his title.

Yolande did not think much of it at the time; she was too deeply engrossed in writing her own name in full, Yolande Mary Veronica Pascoe. But when they got into the brougham to drive away she turned to ask him about it.

"Why didn't you put Gifford?" she said. "I didn't know you had any other names."

"Oh, Gifford is only my last name, and I never use it in business matters, or for signing cheques. John Denis is quite enough."

"It didn't seem like you," she said.

"If it comes to that," he said lightly, "I didn't know either that you had all those names. Jolly pretty ones too!"

Then he suddenly turned to her.

"Yolande—my beloved—my wife" . . . He kissed her again and again; she lay passively in his arms.

"Yes—I am your wife now, Gifford," she said.

They drove in silence to Paddington Station on their way to Devonshire.

CHAPTER XIII

THE place Gifford had chosen was close to the sea on the southern coast of Devonshire. It was a place of deep red cliffs, some of which stood quite out in the sea, of shining sand and tranquil blue waters. It was too soon for the regular tourist season, and there were as yet not many people in the quiet hotel where Gifford had taken rooms. It faced the sea, and the soft, mild, humid air blew in pleasantly through the windows. After the heat of London the quiet and comparative coolness of Devonshire revived Yolande, who had been undergoing, although she scarcely realized it, a time of great anxiety and tension. She was glad now that it had come to an end, and hoped soon that all the world would know she was Gifford's wife. She longed to write to her father, but as yet she had not liked to suggest this to Gifford. She felt that he held too harsh an opinion of him, and that made it difficult for her to approach the subject.

Sometimes they went by train up to the great moorland, which seemed to Yolande such a wonderful and mysterious place, flushed with purple and pink heather that was now beginning to blossom, and golden with great spaces of flowering gorse. The granite tors, lifting harsh and grim shapes against the blue summer sky,

possessed a strange fascination for Yolande. England was so new to her, and it had given her this wonderful gift just as in her childish dreams she had believed that it might. She was radiantly happy, and Gifford was happy too. They were as gay as two children. Even the days at the Villa Falaise and at the Chalet des Pins had held nothing approaching to this happiness. Yolande begged to go and stay up on the moors for a few days, so that they might be even more alone than they were at the seaside. Gifford readily agreed, and soon found rooms in a comfortable farmhouse. This place so delighted Yolande that she expressed a wish to live always in a Devonshire farmhouse. The spacious sunny rooms, the dark-beamed ceilings, the old paneling, the bits of odd china and furniture of black oak, enchanted her.

"I should like always to have wide empty rooms," she said, "with lots of sunshine and fresh air. Hardly any carpets and very little furniture. I think it is because I have always had such small stifling rooms in the *pensions*, with thick carpets and curtains, and velvet chairs that seemed to take all the air away."

"But, my darling, I'm afraid we shall never be able to afford big spacious rooms. We'll have to look out for a tiny flat in town, and I shall have to go and work in the City every day."

"I like the country best," she said. "Couldn't you work in the country instead of in the City, Gifford?"

Gifford shook his head. Indeed, the question of their future was a problem which troubled him

very deeply. There was not a great deal left of the fifty pounds, and he had offered no gift to his little bride except the great heavy wedding ring he had put on her finger on her marriage day. Only she had never seemed to expect gifts. She was happy and unquestioning as a child. But one day she said to him:

"Gifford, don't you think if we were to go to the Place now, and tell your father that we are married, he might forgive you? Do you think he would still dislike me so very much? People do not always dislike me!"

"No," he said, with one of his sudden moods of somber bitterness, "they do not always dislike you. Sometimes they love you too much for their peace of mind, my little Yolande."

But she was in a mischievous mood and did not want him to be too serious.

"And is that how you love me, Gifford?" she demanded, going up to him.

He held her, looking down, as if entranced, upon the perfect beauty of her face—so much more perfect to his seeming than it had ever been before. But his face did not lighten as he answered: "Yes, that is how I love you, and that is why I married you."

"But you're glad too, Gifford? Don't speak like that, as if you were sorry."

"If I am sorry it is for your sake and not for my own," he answered. "I'm nothing but a pauper—I can't afford to keep a wife. So I had no business on earth to marry you, Yolande." He kissed her with a strange tenderness.

"I don't mind being poor," she whispered back,

touching his forehead lightly with her lips; "the only poverty would be to be without you, Gifford. I should feel starved." . . .

She went to the window and looked out at the sweeping expanse of moorland, colored like a pansy in the radiant July sunset.

"To-night we'll go out, Gifford," she said, "for a long, long walk under the stars. And we shall not have to hurry home as we did at the Châlet. If we choose we can stay out there all night. I should love that—to wait and watch for all the shy wild things that come out of the woods at night and play in the moonlight. Wouldn't it be lovely, Gifford?"

"Yes—and you'd be devoured by gnats and midges," he said, laughing. But he knew it was what he would like to do—to go out with her thus to the silent purple moorland, and lie there in the bracken and heather under the stars, and watch for the dawn to come with white delicate radiant feet across the sea, touching the grim tors to gold. . . . "But anyhow you shall have your walk."

It was one of their last evenings at the farmhouse. They started about nine o'clock when the July dusk was falling thickly, heavy with dew and perfume. A young sickle moon hung in the sky. All around them lay the wide desert-world of blossoming heather, a place suggestive of innumerable magic if invisible presences. Above them the hills and tors were etched in blurred silhouette against a sky liquid with moonlight and strewn with stars. The gurgle of a little brook hurrying over brown stones made

a pleasant music in their ears. Furry baby things flashed out and then disappeared. Birds kept up a sleepy twitter in the trees. Sometimes an owl passed over their heads, uttering its long, savage, and melancholy cry. The wind rustled in the dry heather and sang in the trees. But except for these wild sounds the place was very silent, very lonely. Yolande had wished to experience this feeling of being quite alone in some untenanted world with Gifford. She felt that it would make her seem more completely his. And out here on the moorland they seemed to be perfectly alone. Sometimes they could see a light from a distant farmhouse or cottage pricking the darkness. But such lights were all very far away, they did not seem much nearer than the stars that flickered overhead.

The sea was a long way off, and they could not hear it, but something of its keen salt freshness was borne to them on the wings of the night wind. And once a seagull flew past with a sharp cry. It looked like some ghost bird, and it startled Yolande. She held Gifford's arm, and seemed contented to walk on thus in silence.

Presently she said: "Don't you love it here, Gifford?"

"Yes—I love it," he answered. "I should love any place with you, Yolande." It was the lover's conventional reply, but to-night she felt that his words were sad as well as earnest. And he looked down at her small uplifted face. She was more than ever an ethereal thing fashioned of white foam and whiter flame. . . . She belonged to the brown woods and the wild moor-

land and the wet sea winds, just as she had seemed to belong to that white world of blown sand that in the moonlight looked like a range of miniature Alps crowned with silver snows.

"We have known each other just seven weeks," she said. "Can you realize that, Gifford? Eight weeks ago you did not know me—you had never heard my name. And now we are here together. Can you believe it? Sometimes I feel that I shall wake up and find myself back with Tibby in the *pension*—alone—without you. You seem part of a splendid dream, Gifford." . . .

She held his hand, stroking it, caressing it. He had taught her all the sweet and tender ways of love.

"Oh, my darling—I know it seems too good to be true that we should be here together like this! I wish we could remain here forever. The world is such a horrible place, and there are so many evil people in it. And we are so happy—just our two selves . . . like this." There was passion in his voice as well as tenderness. She was infinitely dearer to him now than she had ever been before, and he had always loved her. And she had prayed for his love. He could not forget that. . . . Surely some day there would be a straight path for them both to tread, side by side and hand in hand, even as now. . . .

"How sad you are, Gifford," she said; "is it the night that makes you so sad? Or is it perhaps the stars? They always seem to watch us rather sorrowfully, I think, as if they could see all the mistakes we are making, and perhaps they

are saying: 'There are two people, young and foolish, and who love each other, and who ought never to have married.' "

"Oh, Yolande—don't say such things! It sounds so dreadfully unlucky when I feel that the whole world is conspiring to rob me of you," he entreated.

"Should you mind that so very much—if I went away from you, dear Gifford, and never, never came back? Would you lie awake and cry as I did those first nights at the *Châlet des Pins*?"

"I don't know about crying," said Gifford, "but I think it would kill me. I shouldn't want to live any longer if you left me Yolande. But why do you talk about such dismal possibilities or, rather, impossibilities? You surely won't leave me now you are my wife? Wives don't leave their husbands so easily—and women like you are faithful." . . .

"We won't talk of it," she said gently, "since it makes you unhappy. I'm so happy to-night I could dance."

"You are a fairy—I believe you will vanish like a will-o'-the-wisp," he said grudgingly. "Unless I hold you, Yolande," and he caught her arm in a grip that was fierce.

"I don't need holding, Gifford," she said gently; "I don't want to escape. Doesn't it comfort you to think I'm a Catholic, and that with us marriage is a sacrament and indissoluble? So, you see, I could never leave you—I could never go away." . . .

His hold on her arm relaxed ever so slightly.

Something in her earnest words had startled him. He said in a constrained, almost harsh, voice:

"I don't know much about Catholics. I don't think I knew any—at least not well—until I knew you. My people don't care about them. Lots of people in England dislike the Catholic Church."

"Oh, do they?" she said, in a disappointed tone. "Tibby always said she hoped I should marry a Catholic."

Gifford said with sudden violence:

"What do Churches and creeds matter? We've got to find out where our happiness lies, and take it and stick to it! I think your Church is very beautiful, but it can be cruel, too. Its marriage laws are cruel—they do not consider the individual at all. No set of men have a right to make laws for other men, especially when it is not a question of crime. We have to punish the thief and the murderer for the good and safety of the community, but surely every man has a right to marry where he loves!" He spoke vehemently.

"Is that the reason," she asked, "why your people did not wish you to marry me—because I am a Catholic?"

Gifford wished at that moment he could honestly have said that it was. But he had never mentioned the fact to his father. He said rather awkwardly:

"I don't think that was the only thing. But they always oppose me in everything I want to do. Don't let us talk about such disagreeable

things, darling. Let us enjoy this lovely night. Look at that road climbing over the top of the moor—how white and shining it is in the moonlight! What a lonely place this is!”

They sat down to rest on the dry heather, his arm around her, her head on his shoulder. Overhead the dark blue sky was thick with stars. All the landscape was painted in subtle monochrome in the moonlight. It was very still, only the occasional cries of night-birds broke the silence.

Yolande fell asleep at last, and Gifford, not liking to disturb her, sat there guarding her, until the dawn awoke in the eastern sky. He had no wish to sleep. He tried to put aside all perplexing thoughts of the future with its tremendous uncertainty, its fears, and the terror that her own words had put into his heart. A new terror which seemed to conspire with all the rest to drag her from his side.

She opened her eyes and looked at him sleepily.

“Oh, Gifford, where are we? I think I must have been asleep.”

He bent down and kissed her.

“Yes,” he said; “you have been asleep. And it will be daylight in a few minutes. Shall we go back—do you think you can walk so far?”

Her look of fragility struck him afresh.

She struggled to her feet. “I had a lovely sleep. . . . Didn’t you go to sleep too, Gifford?”

“No,” he said, “I couldn’t sleep; I was thinking of you all the time. I was keeping guard over you, Yolande.” . . .

CHAPTER XIV

BRIGHTON was in its August mood when Gifford went there with Yolande about the middle of the month. Extravagantly he insisted upon taking a suite of rooms at one of the large hotels facing the sea. But he wished to avoid meeting chance acquaintances in the public sitting-rooms, for he felt that he could not face the inevitable questioning which must supervene. He had not chosen Brighton without misgiving. But he wished to be near town in order to search for employment and, though his father and Rex often came to Brighton on business, and his mother did much of her shopping in the King's Road and East Street, he thought there was little likelihood of encountering any of them just now. For at this time of year, in compliance with immemorial habit, they repaired to Scotland for grouse-shooting. It was the first time Gifford could ever remember that he had not accompanied them.

The weather was fine, but with that frequent chilliness which characterizes Brighton even on its days of sunniest glare; the blazing sunshine accompanied by those sudden icy airs made to Yolande's thinking disagreeable climatic conditions; she infinitely preferred the suave moist warmth of the Devonshire coast. But Gifford said their brief holiday must come to an end.

And in the meantime Brighton was better than London in these days of August heat.

And the place amused her enormously. She was interested in the itinerant musicians and troupes of musicians; in the family who each played a different instrument and were said to inhabit a lovely house in the north during the rest of the year, out of the proceeds of their summer earnings; in the masked men who sang sentimental ballads in throaty tenor voices, and in the indefatigable ventriloquists around whom the idle crowds gathered daily on the front. She liked, too, to watch the hordes of London tourists and cheap trippers making their eager way to the sea on excursion days. The great cream-colored houses, with their air of substantial opulence, which faced the sea were for the most part closely shuttered, and wore a deserted aspect as if their inhabitants had proudly abandoned Brighton to the disorderly trippers, and the armies of children who made a daily descent to the beach in company with their white-gowned nurses.

Gifford was already in treaty with one or two firms from which he hoped ultimately to obtain employment, although he feared that the English equivalent to ten thousand francs, which had been the minimum stipulated upon by Madame Dourlay for the modest upkeep of her daughter's *ménage*, would scarcely be forthcoming. It would be dreadful to take Yolande even temporarily to cheap London lodgings with their dinginess and dirt. Still more did he dislike the prospects of becoming a "City" man. He had

very small business capacity, and he had never done a day's work in his life. He wrote to Mr. Hurrell, the family lawyer, told him that he was in disgrace at Merrywood, and asked him to arrange a loan of one hundred pounds for him. This was done, so that he was not for the moment in financial stress. Still it could not be denied that the future wore a dark outlook.

"Is Merrywood far from here?" she asked one day when it first dawned upon her that both Brighton and Merrywood were in Sussex.

"Oh, yes—a good long way," he answered carelessly, "about fifteen miles. And you have to change trains. It's a tiresome journey."

"Shall you go there and see your father?"

"Certainly not. He's the last person in the world I want to see."

They had finished breakfast. Yolande was sitting by the window watching the scene below. As yet it was too early to be animated. But some children were driving along the hard asphalt of the sea-front in their miniature carriages drawn by goats. The sea was rough to-day and very blue, with dark green-gray shadows and tossing yellow crests of foam. She could hear the waves thundering on the beach.

Gifford lit a cigarette.

"Besides, they aren't there now. They always go to Scotland in August to shoot grouse. My father's got a moor. I hate killing birds."

"I should like you to have gone—and told him of our marriage and asked his forgiveness," she said.

He came across the room and touched her hair.

"Should you, my little Yolande? It wouldn't have done any good."

He opened the morning paper and glanced at the news.

"Mrs. Vernon's dead," he said; "she died yesterday. I suppose the Marquise will be going back to France. Did you write to her?"

"Only that once." She had written at Gifford's dictation a few days after their wedding, to tell her that she was away on a visit. A letter of much the same import had been sent to Tibby. Yolande hated these petty duplicities; she would much rather have told them the plain truth, but Gifford had forbidden this with some show of anger.

"Let's hope she won't run across your father and Tibby," said Gifford.

"I don't expect she'll go to Boulogne," said Yolande, "she never does at this time of year. Generally she takes the waters somewhere, or visits her daughter. But I should like to write home soon, Gifford, if you will let me," she went on timidly; "I am sure that poor Tibby is getting anxious. I had a letter from her this morning. Papa had not returned either, so she is still alone."

"There'll be plenty of time to tell them," said Gifford, "why, we have only been married five weeks. Our honeymoon isn't over."

"Tibby asks me when I am going back. And she says I tell her nothing—not even the names of the friends with whom I am staying."

"But surely if it's anyone's business it is your father's? And he doesn't exhibit the slightest curiosity on the subject."

"Papa is away, you see. Perhaps he scarcely realizes." . . .

"My dear child—how awfully obstinate you are! Isn't it enough for you that I'd much rather you didn't tell them anything just yet? Do trust me that I know best, my darling."

In his mind was an unformulated wish that one of those mysterious heart-attacks, from which Major Pascoe was supposed periodically to suffer, might carry him off and leave his daughter perfectly free from outside interference.

As they passed through the hall that morning on the way out Yolande noticed a group of people sitting on wicker-chairs in the wide porch that faced the sea. One woman especially attracted her attention. She was standing there smoking a cigarette in the daintiest possible fashion; she had evidently just risen from one of the wicker-chairs to look at something that interested her outside. Yolande could not help remarking her. She was tiny, but slight and beautifully dressed in white, with white shoes and stockings on her small feet. Her skirt was much shorter than the fashion of those days approved, and it gave her almost the appearance of being quite a young girl. She wore a blue hat tilted a little over her face, although it did not conceal her bright golden hair. She had large blue eyes, and she was really pretty, but her cheeks were rouged and her lips were painted carmine; she looked, Yolande thought, like a charming little actress.

She bestowed an interested stare upon Yolande, who passed quickly on, but the next moment she was arrested by a voice exclaiming:

"Why, Gifford—what are you doing here? Fancy our meeting like this! Aren't you going to speak to me? You surely don't bear me any ill-will now?" Her impertinently good-humored speech was punctuated by shrill laughter that grated on Yolande's ears. She moved back a step and looked at her husband.

Gifford was pale as death; his brows met in a fierce frown; his gray eyes were blazing with temper.

"Don't dare speak to me!" he said rudely. "Come away, Yolande," and he took his wife's arm and half-helped her, half-pushed her down the steps.

But the relentless Cockney voice pursued them.

"But, Gifford, old boy, do stop one minute and tell me your news! I've married again, as I told you I should—and so have you, I suppose? But I never saw anything about it in the paper, though I've kept a sharp look out for it." . . .

"Don't listen to her. Come away, Yolande." Gifford's voice sounded now more desperate than angry. "For God's sake, come away, Yolande!"

He hailed a cab and put her into it. In another moment they were driving westward. But not until Yolande had heard that shrill coarse laugh again—such a strange sound to issue from those pretty painted lips. That sound was destined to ring in Yolande's ears for many a long day.

"Who was that woman, Gifford?" she said.

The expression on his face—so dark and stormy and troubled—alarmed her. He did not speak. She noticed that his hands were shaking as he took out a cigarette and lit it.

"Thank heaven, we are out of that!" he said at last.

Something of his terror had communicated itself to her. She felt a great, a passionate, desire to know the truth. It was suddenly revealed to her that Gifford's desire for secrecy and reticence had had another motive of which he had never told her. There was a mystery and she must know it. It was not right that a man should hide things—important things—from his wife. She looked at him squarely. Under her steady gaze he looked down.

"You must tell me who that woman was, Gifford," she said very quietly.

"My dear child, must I dot all the i's? She had no business to speak to me at all. And I'm not sure what her name is now. She used to be a chorus girl in a musical comedy. Do you want to know any more?"

"She said she had married again and asked if you had done so," said Yolande. She thought she should hear those fatal words echoing forever in her ears. "Were you ever married before you married me, Gifford?"

He tried to evade the question.

"My darling—don't let's talk about her. Can't you see how upset I am? I hated her coming up and speaking to us like that, when you were there." . . . His eyes were hard.

He would have taken her hand but she drew it sharply away. They were passing the Hove lawns—green, smooth stretches of turf. Westward the low Worthing shore was softly painted in tones of lilacs and gray, dipping slightly into the sea. The glare from the pavements hurt her eyes.

"Was that woman ever your wife, Gifford?" she said.

He was silent. He had felt that she would ask this question. And it was difficult to lie to her now—as he had lied so many times.

"My darling Yolande—please don't go digging into my past life!"

"I want to know the truth," she said; "you must tell me the truth now, Gifford. You mustn't keep me in the dark any longer. Was she your wife? Were you ever married, before you married me? You must tell me this if you please, Gifford." Her voice was cold and inexorable.

"It can't make any difference now," said Gifford; "you are my wife now by all the laws in England—nothing can change that, thank God! Yes—she used to be my wife. I married her when I was only twenty, and divorced her the following year. She ran away with another man. I suppose she married him—I didn't take the trouble to inquire." . . .

Yolande's face was set and white, as if it had been carved in marble.

"Do you know what you are saying, Gifford? You had a wife alive when you married me?"

"But I tell you I had divorced her. She wasn't my wife any longer. I had divorced her. I was free." . . .

"But she is your wife. I am a Catholic. Divorce has no meaning for us. I am not your wife, Gifford—I have never been your wife. You must have lied to the priest—as you lied to me! Will you stop the cab, please? I wish to get out."

"Why, you're mad, Yolande! What do you want to do?"

"I am going to leave you, Gifford."

"But you can't leave me! You are my wife. By the laws of England we are legally married." . . .

"I do not understand laws. I obey the Church. And the Church tells me that I cannot be your wife. I am going to leave you—this very day—this very hour!"

Her eyes were dark with pain, her lips firmly set. She looked more beautiful than he had ever seen her look.

"You can't do that," he said doggedly; "we are married—you're my wife. . . . We must stick to each other."

"I am a wicked woman," she said; "you have made me wicked. It was you who forced me to keep our marriage a secret. It was you who made me deceive my father and Tibby. But I can atone. I will never see you again. I am going home to my father!" . . .

The cab stopped. Yolande stepped out on to the pavement. She was hardly aware of the people who passed them, and gazed curiously at the

tall, handsome young couple, who seemed to be disagreeing about something.

"But you can't go like this—alone," he stammered. "You are my wife; Yolande—my beloved wife." . . . His voice broke.

"I have never been your wife," she repeated. Even now she held her head proudly. But her eyes seemed to look beyond Gifford. "That is my great shame." . . . She shuddered. How evil had suddenly become that wonderful love she had given him! How dark with shame were now those few weeks of life with him! . . . How wicked he seemed to her all at once, with his glib and easy lies, his planned and considered deceptions!

"Oh, my dear," . . . he said, "you mustn't go—you mustn't leave me. You said once that you would never leave me. And I love you." . . .

"I am going. You must not try and stop me. I am nothing to you—nothing at all. I am only the woman you taught to be wicked. I am going." She repeated those last three words with a tragic mournfulness; they fell on his ears like a recurring knell.

"You can't go—like this—alone," he said again stubbornly; "you can't go without your luggage." . . .

"I have enough money to take me back to France. And I am going home." Her heart sank a little at the thought of that return. "If you wish you can send my boxes with the things I had as a girl. . . . Nothing else. You must not try and keep me, Gifford. I am not your wife."

"You shan't go, Yolande." His anger was stirred. He seized her, held her hand brutally as in a vice. "I know nothing of your Church and its laws. We are in England, where the Pope's laws don't count. You are my wife, and I will never let you leave me."

The green grass of the long lawns, the shining white pavement, the violently blue sea with its rough yellow crests of foam, were all confused and blurred to her vision. All her thoughts were centered upon the one thing—to leave him as soon as possible. Every moment that she spent with him now seemed to soil her soul.

"Let go my hands, Gifford. Don't make a scene here, please. I am going to the station." She freed herself—how she never knew—from that fierce and painful grasp of his, and ran across the road. She got into a cab and told the man to drive to the station. Gifford, amazed and still unbelieving, stood there like one transfixed, watching her. The clatter of the horse's hoofs on the hard road made him think of the clang of earth falling upon the lowered coffin-lid in some deep grave. Yolande had left him. . . .

CHAPTER XV

IT was evening when the steamer entered Boulogne harbor. The masts and rigging of the ships lying at anchor were delicately etched against a sky that was still blue and clear. Only, over the green valley of the Liane, a faint haze had fallen, blurring ever so slightly the hill of the Petit Moulin. The great Calvary perched almost on the edge of the cliff was quite clearly distinguishable—a conspicuous object to all travelers to and from that busy little port. But Yolande turned her eyes away from it. She could not bear to look at it now. It would always be associated for her with the beginning of her great, her ineradicable shame. It was there she had knelt and prayed; it was there that Gifford had first told her that he loved her; it was there that he had first held her in his arms, and touched her lips with his own. Not three months ago she had stood there with him, listening to his passionate words of love. Love had come to her in no small, in no stinted measure. And she had given love for love; she had given her whole heart to Gifford. Now she felt that that love had blinded and bewildered her, weakening her will. She was coming back bankrupt and outcast, stripped of all she had once possessed. The beautiful adventure was at an end. She was coming back,

as the prodigal had come back, to plead for mercy and forgiveness. Her hands were empty and her heart was desolate. She had believed herself to be Gifford's wife, and she had never been his wife. She felt as if she were no longer the same Yolande who had gone to England so happily with the Marquise. For the first time she realized quite clearly that the step she had taken could never be wiped off the slate of her life. It was a permanent thing, capable of influencing the future as well as the present, capable, too, of affecting other lives, and of bringing a host of painful consequences in its train.

On the quay Tibby's short and square form awaited her. She had telegraphed to Tibby from London. It was a relief at first to see her, and to observe how unaltered she was—how unchanged the shabby coat and skirt of dark blue serge, the hard white sailor hat, which she invariably wore on week-days. Yolande had a sudden eager longing to fling herself into Tibby's arms and weep upon her shoulder. She had not wept at all yet; she had not shed a single tear all through her journey; she felt as hard as if she had been encased in armor. It was the sight of Tibby, so unchanged, so incapable, as it were, of change that seemed suddenly to diminish her strength. She felt incredibly old. She was so much older in experience than Tibby. She was older than any one else in the world. But she straightened herself and held her head erect. She would at least wear the panoply of pride in the hour of her humiliation.

"Oh, Tibby dear—how nice to see you again!" she said almost eagerly; "it seems such ages since I went away. How is papa?"

"Oh, he's very well," said Tibby, kissing her. "He only came back last night. He seemed to miss your going to meet him. I do believe you've got thinner, Yolande. And, child—how white you are! Late hours don't suit you." She looked rather earnestly into Yolande's face. The girl instinctively averted her head. It had come to this then—she could not look her dear old Tibby in the face! She felt sure that her own terrible experience must be written in her eyes—for Tibby, indeed for all the world, to see.

They walked slowly along the quay towards the bridge that spanned the docks.

"You didn't write often," she went on. "I suppose you were too gay, and too taken up with these new friends of yours you were staying with. Were there any girls of your own age?"

"N-no," said Yolande hesitatingly. She quickened her pace. "And I'm sorry papa missed me. But I've come back for good now. I don't ever mean to go away again."

"Didn't you like England?" asked Tibby bluntly.

"I liked it well enough at first. But now I hate it—I never want to go there again!"

"Perhaps you'll find it dull in Boulogne now—after London?"

Yolande slipped her arm in Miss Tibbit's. "Dear Tibby—of course I shan't. It's lovely seeing it all again!"

"There—I knew you'd feel like that!" said

Tibby, with a contented purr; "it was your father who kept on saying you'd be sure to get engaged over there, and come back to tell us that you were going to be married and live in England for the rest of your life!"

Yolande turned very pale, and the hand that grasped Tibby's arm was quickly withdrawn.

"But there's no truth in that I'm sure, my dear?" said Tibby. "You wouldn't get engaged without telling your father and me?"

"I shall never marry—I have made up my mind to that, Tibby," said Yolande, with a strange vehemence, and a wave of crimson color passed over the pallor of her face.

"Girls often say that. But when the right man comes." . . .

"He'll never come—for me," said Yolande with decision.

"And I thought you were falling in love with that young Lumleigh only a month or two ago," said Tibby teasingly.

She looked up, laughing, but the odd expression in Yolande's eyes alarmed her. "Why, what is it, my dear?" she said.

"Nothing, Tibby dear. Only I think it is a mistake to speak lightly and laughingly . . . about such a very serious thing as falling in love."

"You're right, my dear. It is a serious thing—yet people do laugh at two young things in love with each other."

"I wonder why they do," said Yolande dreamily; "love can be . . . such a terrible thing . . . such a wicked thing!"

"Dear child—where do you get such strange

ideas from?" said Miss Tibbit uneasily. "Who has been talking to you—about such dreadful things?"

Yolande was silent for a moment. Then she said in a cold tone:

"No one has been talking to me exactly, Tibby. Girls get to know these things. Tibby—love isn't always beautiful—it can be evil and cruel. That is why I don't ever want to be married. Let's talk of something else. Have you seen Madame de Solignac? I don't think, though, that she can have come back, for her friend only died yesterday."

"No—I've not seen her."

They had reached the door of the *pension*. Yolande went straight upstairs to her father's sitting-room, a small and stuffy apartment at the top of the house. He was sitting near the window, smoking and reading the *New York Herald*. As she stooped to kiss him he put down his pipe and gathered her closely. The action so full of simple affection touched her unspeakably. "My darling child—my dear Yolande!" he said, kissing her.

She was prepared to find a change in him, yet she hated to perceive the subtle metamorphosis from the man she had always believed him to be to the man whom Gifford had so harshly condemned. She saw him with new eyes, as of a person just awakened, and was aware that his whole appearance was in keeping with Gifford's estimate of him. He was seedy-looking, *patraque*, as the French say, a little out of repair. Since his summer escapade he had descended further

upon that downward course. But despite his inherent unreliableness, his instability, he still spelt to Yolande something that was as permanent and changeless as the everlasting hills. He was her father, and he had never failed in kindness. Amid so much that was fugitive and perishable she saw in him something that was enduringly secure and dear. And it was he, Maxim Pascoe, who had placed in his daughter's hands that weapon which at the crisis of her life she had been forced to turn so mercilessly upon herself, piercing therewith her own heart.

Like the woman in the old fairy-tale, she had asked and received, and asked and received with an easy facility that mocked at obstacles, only in the end to awaken and find herself back in the cottage from which she originally came. Denuded of all—flung back upon penury. . . . And as she stood there those English scenes passed swiftly through her mind. The London streets, gay and thronged, yet holding for her but the one face; the Park crowded with women in dainty summer attire moving under the trees like bright, yet languid butterflies. The theaters and opera-house, where the lights and jewels flashed amid scenes of unimagined brilliance. Then Devonshire, with its wooded combes dipping to the sea; the red cliffs, the blue waters . . . and the white seagulls crying above her head . . . the trees and ferns climbing down almost to the foot of the sandy coves. The long sunny days on the moorland, and that one long remembered night when she had slept out on the

moor under the stars, and had wakened to find Gifford near her, and the white dawn coming towards her as if upon delicate wings. But most clear in its sharp, hard brilliance was that last scene—enacted only that very morning, although it seemed now as if it must have happened years and years ago—when she had parted from Gifford at Brighton. She saw him as she had last seen him in the white glare of the street, standing there alone and dispossessed. She could feel compassion for him, though she had none for herself. He had played and lost with a royal recklessness. And she knew that there was one thing it was impossible he should ever lose—the love that he had in those last few weeks won from her.

“I’m so glad to be back, papa,” she said; “I’ve missed you so, and Tibby too. It is the first time I have ever been away alone. And I don’t mean ever to go away again.” She put her cheek against his; there was a new tenderness in her caress. Then the recoil came. It was Gifford who had taught her these new ways of tenderness—Gifford who had pressed his hard cheek against hers and played with her fingers. The remembrance gave her a sharp pang; she drew a little away.

“That’s right, my dear,” said the unsuspecting Maxim; “I’ve missed you too. I was afraid you were going to find some one better worth loving than your old Dad—some one who’d want you to go and live in England.”

It was strange that this expectation should

have occupied both her father's thoughts and Tibby's—an expectation, too, which had so nearly known realization.

But she could not tell him yet. Not now when he was so manifestly delighted at seeing her again.

"Oh, papa—how could you imagine anything so horrid? I shall begin to think you want to get rid of me!"

He looked at her, and though his blue eyes were less bright than they used to be they still held a merry sparkle.

"Were they all blind then?" he said. "Did none of them see what a pretty girl I'd got for a daughter?" He looked at her fondly.

"You are prejudiced, papa," she answered, smiling; "I'm not really a bit pretty . . . and the English girls are so pink and white, I feel quite brown beside them! And the proof is . . . that I've come back to you and Tibby. . . ."

"I made sure that you would come back engaged at least, Yolande," he said gaily.

Not that he wanted to lose her, and it was good to have her back, but he remembered that old conversation when Tibby had taken him furiously to task, and he thought Yolande's early marriage might solve many problems. And his heart had given him one or two sharp reminders of late.

She flushed a little. "No—I'm not even engaged," . . . she said. "And what is more, I never intend to be."

"Tut-tut!" said the Major.

"I'll go and take off my things," said Yolande.

She went slowly out of the room. She had borne the first brunt of their questionings, but all her nerves were on edge. She feared, above all things, to hear Gifford's name spoken. Already it had once escaped Tibby's lips. She would have to tell them both very soon. She could not go on nursing this secret. And she would have to go to confession—to whom she could not yet make up her mind. And hidden in her heart, so deeply that she dared not yet acknowledge it to herself, there was a new and vital fear, lurking in ambush, ready to crystallize into certainty. . . .

Ah, if she could only put the clock back, and be again that happy girl, secure and sheltered, playing tennis at the Villa Falaise, walking on the Plage with Tibby, mending and darning, and hating the task and the petty restriction it involved . . . above all, if Fate had never drawn Gifford into her path and permitted her to love him! . . .

She saw him now in his true light, stripped of all enchantment. And in spite of all things she knew that she still loved him. The thought of that dark blank separation which lay in front of her was an appalling one. She could even make excuses for him. His home life had been an unhappy one, full of rebellion, of small mutinies, of angry scenes. His father's harshness had embittered him and made him a little reckless. He retaliated by taking his pleasure where he could, regardless of others. His upbringing had developed all that was selfish and unscrupulous in his nature; had it been different she felt that

he would have been different. As a child, he had practised deceit, coldly, deliberately, to evade punishment. The habit had grown upon him. He had been perpetually thwarted. She felt anguish for that soul so bent upon its own destruction. On his careless triumphant way he had sacrificed her also. She wondered in how many ways, not yet revealed, he had deceived her. There was the strange omission of his name of Gifford in the signature of his marriage register; there was the absence of any mention of his father's title. Perhaps he had not intended that the marriage should be a legal one. Her face flamed at the thought of her own acquiescence. All through she had scarcely shown any resistance at all. His very plausibility had disarmed her. Now she had come back alone, a broken, disillusioned woman—so poor, who had once been so rich. And there was the future to be faced with its possible harvest of terror and shame. . . .

She could not yet see clearly; it was all too close to her. It was difficult to realize that their happiness had come to such an abrupt and, for her, tragic ending; and that all these latent and intricate energies of emotion and joy, which his love had awakened and vitalized, must needs fall back into their ancient dormant quiescence, seeking not life, but atrophy.

"Tibby," said Major Pascoe a day or two later, "I don't think England agreed with Yolande. She is looking very white and peaky. I think she ought to see a doctor."

Miss Tibbit compressed her lips firmly. It

gave her the prim governess look which age had rather softened.

"I have noticed a change, Major Pascoe," she said; "but it began before she went to England. I believe it has something to do with that young Mr. Lumleigh she met in the summer."

"Lumleigh? Who's he? Never knew any-one of the name! Boulogne man?"

"No, but he was here studying French in the summer. She used to meet him at the Marquise's. And he was always hanging about. After he went away I noticed that she seemed dull . . . and hipped." . . .

She had not meant to make mischief; her speech was the result of her own complete ignorance. She was genuinely afraid that Yolande was fretting for Mr. Lumleigh.

CHAPTER XVI

MISS TIBBIT had unwittingly, but nevertheless extremely irretrievably, put the "fat in the fire" by those chance words of anxiety to her employer. Yolande, blaming her bitterly at first, learned to be grateful to her for breaking down the barriers and precipitating the inevitable confession.

She was sitting alone with her father one morning, a few days later. She had a book in her hand, but she was not reading. Her eyes watched idly the familiar busy scene on the quay below, the silvery piles of fish, the men in their brown jerseys, the women black-garbed with their stiff linen caps, the careful slow approach of a fishing-boat with its heavy red weather-beaten sail. . . .

Major Pascoe was also ostensibly reading, but his eyes remained fixed on the large headlines of the *New York Herald*, which so far had conveyed nothing to a brain entirely preoccupied with a vague anxiety concerning his daughter.

Putting down the paper, he filled and lit his pipe with great deliberation, performing the task rather more slowly than usual. This accomplished, he rose to his feet. He had been up late the night before, unable to tear himself away when his luck was so extraordinarily good, and he did not feel quite braced to the task of cross-

questioning Yolande. It had, however, been postponed for several days, and during that time Yolande had looked even more tired and ill than when she first returned from England. He did not like, therefore, to defer the evil moment. For he had a kind of dim presentiment that it would certainly prove an evil moment. He was now strongly convinced that while in England she had been greatly controlled by some quite new influence. It betrayed itself a little in her manner, in new ways and expressions, and also in her face, which bore across its still curious immaturity the evidence of some vital experience, which could not have been altogether a happy one.

"My dear Yolande," he began cautiously, "you don't look as if you had slept very well last night. And if you go on getting thinner you will certainly have to see a doctor. Don't you feel well, my dear child?"

It was a distinct opening, but she was too startled to avail herself of it. She answered, trying to speak lightly:

"Oh, I'm quite well, papa. I don't think I'm any thinner."

"Tibby tells me that you do not feel able to get up and go to an early Mass with her. You used always to do that. It is nothing to do with your religion . . . that is troubling you?" He said this almost diffidently.

"Oh, no." . . .

"Now about that young Mr. Lumleigh who was here in the summer. . . . He was not a Catholic, I suppose?"

At the mention of Gifford's name Yolande's

face, wide-eyed and terror-stricken, had the look of one expecting a blow. She was white to the lips; her heart beat violently; she could feel herself trembling. What did he know?

"No—he was not a Catholic," she said in a low tone.

"You haven't refused him on that account?" asked her father, and now she saw quite clearly that something—some one—had definitely aroused his suspicious anxiety.

"No," she said again.

She felt more than ever that she could not allow herself to be "rushed" into an explanation; she must choose her own day and hour.

"It is not true, then," he pursued, with an odd relentlessness, "what Tibby suggests—that you're fretting about him?"

Yolande gave a low cry and hid her face in her hands. It was his intention then to rush the position, to elicit explanation. Her courage gave way; her nervous tension expressed itself in that sudden cry; in that pitiful effort to hide her face from his now anxious and astonished eyes. . . .

"Why, my darling, what's the matter? You don't mean to tell me that there was anything between you and this young chap?"

Still she did not answer. Major Pascoe became alarmed, and, like many people, anxiety rendered him angry. Rather roughly he pulled her hands away from her face and turned it up to his own.

"You must tell me, please, Yolande," he said.

"I . . . I can't tell you, papa," she said,

trembling. "I can't tell you" . . . she said again.

"Yolande," he said, "I daresay many people would think I have neglected you. It is true that I have not been . . . all that a father should be. But you are my daughter and now you must obey me." . . .

What would he say when he knew the truth? She had expected him to be grieved beyond words; now she felt afraid of him, of his growing anger, of the almost fierce look in his blue eyes that had become suddenly hard.

"I married Gifford Lumleigh when I was in England," she said at last with a desperate effort. "I did not tell you because he insisted upon keeping it a secret. He said his father would not approve of it, and would refuse to give him any money. We went first to Devonshire. And when we had been married a few weeks we went to Brighton—and there we met a woman who was his wife. He had divorced her. He told me then that our marriage was a legal one in England . . . but for me I knew that it was no marriage at all. I left him that very day—that very hour. I came back here. I meant to tell you . . . but I was afraid. I am sorry that I deceived you and Tibby . . . but I have been heavily punished . . . you must forgive me."

She was on her knees now, clasping his hands in her own. He gently raised her. All his anger was gone. He could only remember of her that at the crucial moment, when she had had to make her final decision, she had without hesi-

tation chosen the path which alone was open to her as a Catholic; that no considerations of happiness had seemed of any account; that she had deliberately flung from her the gifts of love, spurning them, indeed, for the faith which long ago he had promised Veronica should be hers. He was perplexed and infinitely bewildered by the results of the education he had given her. Just when it seemed to have failed it had borne sudden, if to her bitter, fruit. And because he did not share her faith the anguish of her position pierced him like a sword.

"And you told no one?" he said. "Not even Madame de Solignac?"

"No," she said, "I have told no one. But I did once say to Madame De Solignac that we were engaged." . . .

Major Pascoe turned away, and for a moment stood by the window. There had been a shower of rain, and the quay was dark and shining with moisture. Low gray clouds drifted sullenly across the face of the sky.

"You are his wife according to English law," he said. "You have the right to bear his name."

"I will never use his name!" she broke out passionately. "If what I have been taught all my life is true I am not his wife at all. I am very wicked . . . but I did not mean to be wicked. It was wrong to deceive you—and I knew I was doing that. But Gifford said I owed loyalty to him as well." . . .

"I must consult Prendergast," murmured the Major. Prendergast was the family lawyer and a very old and valued friend. "Yes—I wish

you hadn't deceived me, Yolande. It's an ugly story, and so far you were to blame. I ought to have looked after you better. I'm to blame, too."

"But now I have told you," she said, "I promise never to deceive you again. . . . Only I want to go away from here. I'm afraid that Gifford will come, and try and persuade me to go back to him. I want to go far away with you and Tibby, and forget him!"

"Perhaps I ought to write to his father," he said presently. "Do you know where he lives?"

"His father is Lord Strode, and lives at a house called Merrywood Place in Sussex. But it would do no good to write to him. He knows nothing about me. Gifford has told him nothing. I only want to go away as soon as possible. Somewhere where he can never find me!"

"Of course we will go, my dear," he said gently; "but what made you do such a mad thing?"

"I loved him," she said desperately—"I loved him very much. And he loved me." . . . She broke into passionate weeping.

He looked at her compassionately. So it had not been an easy sacrifice, this sudden severance, this abrupt and final leave-taking. Again he felt, through all his pity and sorrow, a kind of triumph at her gallant little victory the first time she had ever been called upon to put her faith to the test. This was, indeed, Veronica's daughter. Yet he had never felt that Yolande was so passionately attached to her faith as her mother had been.

"You are very young," he said; "but your mother was even younger when I married her." . . .

Yolande looked him full in the face, and her eyes were strange and her voice was hard and bitter.

"Perhaps I shall die as she did" . . . she said.

"Oh! Yolande—you can't mean that!" he said. Surely there could not be this final cruel complication to add to the sum of her misery?

He looked at her aghast.

"Yes," she said, "and I shall pray to die." . . . She moved past him and went slowly and listlessly from the room. She had told him everything now—all that she knew, all that she feared. . . .

During the days that followed there came no news of Gifford, and the few weeks she had spent in England faded a little from Yolande's mind, and became more and more like some beautiful, but terrible dream. She was perhaps too young to realize fully her own disastrous position. She craved only for obscurity and peace, and seemed to have but one desire—to leave Boulogne as soon as possible. The gentle, motherly, silent attentions of Tibby and the tender and protective care of her father soothed her almost insensibly into a new calmness. It seemed as if these two figures were tacitly employed upon sheltering her from any recurrence of the storms and deep waters through which she had passed. Her love for Gifford underwent, in the first days of their

separation, a fierce, if subtle change. She did not wish to see him again. She was ashamed now of the love which had so weakened her will, and compelled her submission. She felt that even if he were free to marry her she could never return to him. She could never forget how he had deceived and duped her. It would be impossible to trust him. And then there would suddenly supervene the hunger for that very love; for its eager caresses, its ardent, tender words, its sweeping away of all loneliness. . . .

But he made no effort to seek her. She wondered what his next move would be. She was his wife, yet not his wife. She was neither bound, nor was she legally free.

In the contemplation of his daughter's disaster Major Pascoe became a changed man. Literally, he turned over a new leaf. He seemed to have no thought but for Yolande. All that was good in him—and there was still a fair measure—came to the surface. He assumed command of the position, just as in the old days he had assumed command of those forlorn outposts of Empire, and held them against fierce attack and obdurate onslaught.

"We must leave Boulogne, Tibby," he said loftily.

"Yes," said Miss Tibbit, looking up from her knitting.

"The question is where shall we go?"

He had turned over the names of many places in his mind. Paris?—it was too near and he was too well-known, had too many friends there.

Florence? Too many English. Bruges—Brussels—always there were too many English. . . .

Madame de Solignac, however, put an end to the discussion. She came to see him one morning when Tibby and Yolande had gone out together. She had no great liking for Major Pascoe, and she had sincerely pitied his daughter. But she had a special reason for seeking him out. She had been told that a mutual friend had seen Yolande and Gifford Lumleigh together in Brighton at a time when she believed that the girl's visit to friends must have ended, and when, indeed, she thought Yolande had long ago returned to France.

She wore black for her friend and looked slightly more subdued than usual, in spite of her extraordinarily vivid coloring.

"I have come to see you about Yolande," she said.

"What can you have to say?" he said sadly.

"You mean she was in my care? But I don't know yet what has happened." . . .

"She was in your care," he said, "and she married a man called Gifford Lumleigh, not knowing that he had a divorced wife still alive. She is too good a Catholic not to know that for her it wasn't any marriage at all." . . .

"A divorced wife!" she exclaimed. "Poor child!—how on earth did she find it out?"

"They ran across her in Brighton, and it seems she accosted Lumleigh, and he afterwards admitted that there had been a marriage."

"And then?" . . .

"She just left him—*planté là!*"

"And came back to you?"

"And came back to me."

She was sitting near the window, and in the rather dull surroundings she looked singularly out of keeping. She always had the finished, polished look of a woman who emerges every morning from the hands of a capable and competent maid. Her little gloved hands lay folded on her lap.

"I hope," she said at last, "that you don't blame me for the whole thing? I was never in Yolande's confidence, but I thought they were engaged, and when she said that his father did not approve, and would give them no money, I urged her to come and consult you as to whether it would be prudent to go on with anything so uncertain. I suppose they were married by special licence?"

"On the day after you left town," subjoined Major Pascoe.

"And what are you going to do about it all?"

"I've written to Prendergast—my lawyer—to find out just where she stands. They are bound in so far that neither can make another marriage. Yolande could no doubt get it annulled in the English courts on the ground that she was a Catholic, and knew nothing of a former marriage. But she doesn't want to do that. She dislikes the thought of the publicity, and though the man very grossly deceived her she doesn't want to show him up. But even if she did get the marriage set aside as invalid" . . . He stopped now and regarded her almost defiantly—"it

wouldn't interfere with the principal point at issue." . . .

"And that is?" . . . inquired the Marquise, feeling extremely uncomfortable.

"The legitimacy of any child that may be born to her!" said Maxim Pascoe.

Madame de Solignac turned a shade paler. "But let us hope" . . . she began.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyhow, I want to get her away," he said, "as soon as possible. She's afraid he'll come and she wants to hide from him. That's her one idea—to hide. And I can't think of any place to go to!"

"Why, there is my little villa at San Giuliano," she said, "on the Italian coast not far from Porto Fino. You'd better go there—you can be as quiet as you wish. And the sunshine will do Yolande good. It won't be too hot in September. You could travel quietly through Switzerland first. And you can have the villa for as long as you like. I've not set foot in it for five years, though I have let it most winters. Won't you do this—if you will accept it from me?"

"It is very kind of you," he said. "I'll talk it over with Tibby. We must fix on something soon."

"And about the child," she hesitated. "I heard something about the Strodes when I was in England, and it seems that the estates can never pass into Catholic hands. This disability goes back to the will of the first Lord Strode. Only Gifford is fortunately a younger son. Still

it makes his marriage an even more rash one than it seemed at first, and this perhaps supplies some motive for his determined secrecy."

"And it makes him seem more of a scoundrel than one could have imagined," said the Major grimly. "And I am perfectly certain he never mentioned such a thing to Yolande at all. He kept her absolutely in the dark. My little girl is only just eighteen—and her life is ruined!" He spoke passionately and his blue eyes flamed. "If he ever shows his face here I shall shoot him!"

"Where were they married?" she asked.

"In some small Catholic church in an out-of-the-way quarter of London, where I suppose he had a temporary domicile. What did he tell the priest, I wonder? How did he get him to consent?"

"And you won't try, in spite of Yolande, to annul the marriage—as far as its legality in England is concerned?" she said.

"She's dead against that at present. And, in any case, I can't see how that would affect the future. What you tell me makes it even more complicated. Supposing Gifford should ever succeed to the title—and if the worst comes to the worst and there is a child born—don't you suppose he will use every effort to secure the control of his heir, so that it shall not be brought up in its mother's faith?"

The Major's mind had during the past week regained a good deal of its natural clearness. He could review a situation and all its attendant possibilities with his old strategical eye. And he

now saw all the devious, difficult mazes into which Yolande's single false step might hereafter lead her.

"The only thing that's pleased me," he resumed, after a pause, in which Madame de Solignac offered no remark, "was Yolande's complete and instantaneous rupture with him the moment she found him out. She doesn't seem to have had one single instant of indecision or doubt. She saw at once it wasn't—from the point of view of a Catholic—a marriage at all. I'm not a Catholic myself, but I have at least seen that she was brought up as one. Sometimes I've thought she was a little indifferent to her religion, especially the last year or two; she was pious enough as a little child. But now I see that she's got it in her—very strongly—and she chose it before anything else in the world. For she did love this man. Whether she loves him still in spite of all things it's a little difficult to judge."

"Oh, yes—she'd do that," said the Marquise musingly; "leave him, I mean. To any girl brought up as a Catholic it would be a shock. Some people wouldn't be good enough or strong enough to make the separation permanent. But Yolande has a great deal of character, and she was very headstrong about the whole thing. I'm only sorry it should have happened while she was in my care. But I daresay she told you that my friend was dying—and I went away with her and stayed with her until she died?"

"Yes—she told me about that. But the affair began at the Villa Falaise last June, and at the Châlet des Pins they saw a great deal of each

other. Moonlight walks on the dunes and in the pine-woods." He shrugged his shoulders. "And he made a point of her keeping silence from the very first. She was too young and inexperienced to recognize that for a danger signal. He was determined to marry her, and I suppose he thought he could 'square the Pope.' Oh, the expression isn't my own! There are lots of ignoramuses who believe the Pope can annul even a Protestant marriage, and I daresay he thought he could get his first marriage annulled in this way. What must have surprised him is that a girl, who could go all that way in deceiving her father and keeping him in the dark, would stick by her religion when it came to the point!"

"But now about the future," she said; "will you think over my suggestion? I should be so glad for you to have my villa at San Giuliano for as long as you both like. It is very quiet and very charming, and I want to make some amends to Yolande. . . . She is very dear to me, Major Pascoe. And I hope some day she will find real happiness." . . .

"It is very kind of you," he said; "I'll talk to her about it. We haven't been able to think of any place at present. If Gifford Lumleigh means to find her he's sure to scour the gaming-tables of Europe for me. And I need not tell you that for her sake I shall never be seen at one of them again!"

"I think you are quite right," she said. "And for the present it will be wise to hide. You'll go soon, I suppose?"

"I've given them their marching orders," he

said; "Tibby will come with us, of course. We can't let poor old Tibby go!"

The Marquise rose from her seat.

"And if you do decide to go there," she said, "I hope I may sometimes be allowed to come and see Yolande. You may trust me to keep the secret of her whereabouts."

Major Pascoe escorted her downstairs to the door. In view of his heart-attacks he felt relieved to think that Yolande should have such a firm and kind friend.

After a long consultation they all three decided unanimously in favor of the villa at San Giuliano.

CHAPTER XVII

THE village of San Giuliano is a singularly beautiful though unfrequented one, lying amid the chestnut woods and olive-groves of the Riviera di Levante, beyond the city of Genoa. The blue bay, calm and colored like a turquoise in those beautiful September days, was rimmed by the outlines of gracious hills ending in the great promontory of Porto Fino thrust like a long violet arm into the sea.

There were very few English in the place, and these were happily of the "bird-of-passage" order. There was nothing in San Giuliano to detain them beyond a single night. The arrival of the little party from Boulogne attracted no attention at all. The Villa Viola (called thus after the Marquise by her late adoring husband), was in a very sequestered part, on a steep hill above the village and overlooking the bay. Its quietness and peace from the first soothed Yolande. The journey had been made in slow stages, and for a few weeks they had sojourned at a remote village in the higher Alps before passing down into Italy. By the time they arrived at San Giuliano September was almost at an end.

A few of the larger villas belonged to rich Italians or Russians, but at present these houses were closed. Later, perhaps, their migratory

owners might pass some of the winter months there. But in any case none of the little group at the Villa Viola had any desire for their society. Yolande, indeed, never went beyond the garden and olive-grove which belonged to the villa, except on Sundays, when she accompanied Tibby to Mass in the little church whose pointed campanile stood up white and sharp above a grove of date-palms and cypresses.

The Marquise paid them a visit early in January on her way to Rome. She promised to return, and did so about the middle of April. Major Pascoe, who was now definitely alarmed about Yolande's increasing weakness, entreated her to remain. The Marquise took command of the situation. Even Tibby's claims were set aside. She insisted upon sending for an eminent specialist from Milan, and at the end of the month Yolande's child—a little boy—was born.

Yolande had ceased to have that ardent desire for death which had at first possessed her. Instead, there had come to her an eager desire to live to see her child. But there had not been, at one time, much hope of saving the mother's life. Her weakness was extreme, and she received quite consciously the Last Sacraments. In the end her youth and her strong vitality conquered. She was to live—to be mother and father in one—to her fatherless child.

She was glad during those days of weak convalescence to have the companionship of Viola de Solignac, and, indeed, without her she would have fared badly. Tibby was prostrated by anxiety and had retired to bed a few days after little

Ambrose arrived in the world, and Major Pascoe had broken all his good resolutions by drowning suspense with the only means he considered to be absolutely reliable. To do him justice, it was his first real break-down since they had left Boulogne, and the knowledge of it was rigorously kept from Yolande.

Ambrose Lumleigh—to give him the name to which he was at any rate legally entitled—was a small, delicate infant, with large dark eyes that were almost black, and dark silken hair that curled in little rings over his head just as Yolande's had done when she was a baby. Indeed, his resemblance to his mother was then, as always, quite extraordinary, though he never possessed more than a mere shadow and suggestion of her beauty. But his coming restored to Yolande the full bloom of her arresting loveliness, just as it seemed to give her back a happiness that appeared to have been destroyed forever. After the first few weeks she and Tibby looked after him without any other nurse. She felt incapable of yielding the charge of anything so precious to another woman, however experienced. Major Pascoe protested a little at first, fearing that she was scarcely strong enough for the task. But she overruled all his objections.

The Marquise stayed long enough to be present at the child's baptism, for Yolande had invited her to be his godmother. He was given the names of Ambrose Maxim Gifford. It was with some hesitation that she had thus added his father's name.

Major Pascoe became once more a reformed

character. He adored his little grandson, and took, perhaps, a livelier interest in him than he had done in Yolande at that stage of her career. His love for his daughter had a new quality; perhaps he had never quite realized how dear she was until he had found himself face to face with the terrible possibility of losing her. The little family circle, over which Tibby watched so proudly, was a curiously happy and united one.

Tibby's rôle of governess had fallen from her immediately after Yolande's return from England to Boulogne in the summer. Even before she had learned her story she had recognized that their old relations could never be resumed. Yolande was a child no more, and she had passed beyond the range of Tibby's teaching. Yet there was never any question that Miss Tibbit should seek another sphere of activity. She was part of the household. She became a kind of *dame de compagnie*, receiving no salary as her income had recently been increased by a tiny legacy which rendered her independent. Her footing was therefore quite unofficial, and she was the trusted friend and counselor, an enduring witness to Major Pascoe's *flair*. Now she willingly added to these parts the duties of a devoted under-nurse.

They stayed there all through the summer. The weeks passed very uneventfully in the little white villa peeping out from the soft silver-grayness of the olive-woods. Yolande was immensely preoccupied with Ambrose, and it must be said that he represented the hub of that little universe. His mother adored him, and he seemed to fill the

place Gifford had left empty in her heart. She never prayed now, as she had done at first, that Gifford might return to her free. She was even afraid that he might come thus, and claim her and her boy, who was now so exclusively her own. She felt that she could not share him with any one living. The events of last year had faded a little from her mind. Even Gifford's face had grown less passionately distinct. She did not wish to return to the enslaving demands of that old love that had once so held her.

Chance, however—that most fatal of all destiny's instruments—brought her face to face with Gifford one afternoon when she had strolled down alone to the little port that lay below the village. She had not noticed the arrival of an English yacht in the harbor, for she had grown careless of late about watching for such possible sources of danger. She was walking quietly along the bright sunny street, whose shady arcades afforded shelter for the lace-makers who sat there so diligently at their task, when above the sound of their ceaseless chatter an English voice accosted her, asking the way.

She turned, and came face to face with Gifford Lumleigh. Recognition was immediate, to pass him was impossible. Until she turned he had not had the slightest idea whom he was addressing. He was seeking her, it is true, but no longer so diligently as he had once done. He was now on a cruise with some friends, and had had no thought of meeting her in the tiny, unfrequented village of San Giuliano.

"Yolande" . . . he said.

He looked extremely young—almost absurdly so—in his white yachting suit and straw hat. Younger almost than he had done on that day—now rather more than a year ago—when Yolande had left him.

She did not touch the hand that he had now offered her, and he let it drop limply at his side.

“My dear Yolande—you will speak to me, won’t you?” he said, and there was the old, caressing, entreating note in his voice which once had lured her to her doom, but which she now felt had no power to move her. Yet in her heart the old love struggled and fluttered, as if his very presence were galvanizing it into an unwilling life. . . .

“Yolande—have you forgotten me, darling?” he said, and a sob sounded in his voice. It pierced her heart like a sword.

“Of course I haven’t forgotten you, Gifford. But why have you come?”

She spoke with a coldness that seemed immediately to check his rising emotion.

“I . . . I didn’t know you were here” . . . he said miserably.

“I am here with my father and Miss Tibbit.” She did not allude to her as Tibby, the touch of formality was not lost upon him.

She had not moved since his approach, but now she turned away from the harbor, and directed her steps towards the white, unshaded road that led steeply through the village and past the church towards the Villa Viola. Gifford followed her.

At the top of the street she stopped.

"Please do not come any further," she said; "I am going home. Do not come."

She wore the look of one who has dived into deep waters, learning their secrets, their cold, unimagined perils, and whose emergence therefrom has bestowed a new and accurate vision to bear upon the things of earth. Those dark strange eyes of hers—with the dusky mysterious radiance of deep forest pools, remote and cold! . . .

But he knew then that this single glimpse of her had sufficed to span the chasm between their abrupt separation and their sudden meeting. All of that time between became to him a vague gray blur of emptiness and silence, a measureless void, colorless, formless, as shadowless as it was also without light. It seemed to him also as if, during that time—which already was growing remote and inapparent—every emotion had been suspended, so that all his vitality and energy had been concentrated only upon the achievement of that gigantic task of waiting. . . .

Waiting to see her—to find her—and she was telling him in that cold voice of hers to go away—to leave what he had just found. . . . The tears rushed to his eyes.

"Don't send me away, Yolande . . . I am free!" he said; "that woman you saw is dead. I am free," he repeated.

Free? The word smote her like a blow.

"She died last March," he went on, "and ever since I have been trying to trace you—to find you. I inquired everywhere—at Boulogne—in

Paris—at Monte Carlo. . . . I could get no news anywhere!” His gray eyes flashed like smoldering fires through the black lashes.

“You cannot come with me,” she said gravely; “in the first place my father would not receive you. And . . . there is no place in my life for you now. You must understand that. I have other things to consider. My father and my . . . my son, Gifford.”

“Your *son*, Yolande?” he said. “Your son?”

“He was born here—last April,” she said.

She remembered one mad dream she had had—of putting into Gifford’s arms the child of their love.

“My son,” he muttered, “my son.” . . . The possibility of fatherhood had never entered his head and the news came with a bewildering violence. “You’re not going to keep me from seeing him, Yolande? I . . . I must see him.” . . .

Already his voice, his words, stirred within her the old emotion, the old tenderness, which she had believed dead.

She said more gently:

“I will tell papa and Miss Tibbit that you are here. If they permit it I will write and ask you to come. But you must not come now.”

“I must see my son,” he said doggedly.

She moved as if to leave him.

“Yolande” . . . he said entreatingly. “Don’t be so hard—don’t be so cruel. You loved me once, and I have never ceased loving you since those days at Villa Falaise. And I am free to marry you my darling, if you still do not believe

that you are my wife, and have been my wife now for a whole year!"

"I will write," she said again. "You are staying in the hotel? I will send a note there to-night. But you must not expect to be allowed to come. My father is very angry with you." . . .

This time she walked slowly away from him, and he did not venture to follow her. But he watched her, gazing hungrily until she had disappeared round the corner of the steep and crooked street.

Then he went back to the hotel, and sat alone in the loggia overlooking the harbor, dreaming of his encounter with Yolande . . . dreaming of his little son.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was some time before Yolande was able to persuade Major Pascoe to receive Gifford. That chance meeting had so completely destroyed all their plans of concealment that to Yolande it mattered little now whether he came to see Ambrose or not. He could, by making inquiries at the hotel and elsewhere, have easily elicited all the information she had given him.

And since his wife was dead she had come face to face with an entirely new problem. Ambrose was his son; had, indeed, every right to his father's name; she could hardly deny him access to him at present. The future must be discussed, and discussed temperately and fairly. Major Pascoe refused at first to see any necessity for this. He hated violently this man whom he had never seen. He would have denied him any right to speak to Yolande. He would have closed his doors to him. He said all this with a new and savage anger. This man had no claim upon her. He had forfeited all claim. He had behaved like a scoundrel. Was Yolande thinking of marrying him that she wished to invite him to the Villa Viola?

"Papa," she said at last, "please don't be angry about it. It is true that I had given up thinking of Gifford. . . . Do not make it so difficult for me to tell you." . . . She laid her hand on his

arm. "I did love him—last year" . . . she said, with a kind of desperation. "I can't send him away without a word!"

"Haven't you any pride?" he said angrily.

"I must think of Ambrose" . . . she said.

"You are deceiving yourself, Yolande," he said; "you have allowed yourself to come under this man's evil influence again. I shall do all I can to stop your remarriage. And if you are wise you will refrain from legalizing the tie. Your son will be far better brought up away from such a father! What did he care when you were down at death's door last April?" He flung the words at her with violence.

"Papa—I want you to see Gifford and hear what he has to say. Then, if you think it is still unwise and imprudent, I will do as you wish."

"He has spoken then? He does want you to go back to him?"

She lowered her eyes.

"He seemed very unhappy," she said. "I am obliged to believe that he does care for me very much." She said it so simply that even in his anger he could not forbear to smile at her naïveté.

"If he comes here, Yolande, I shall tell him exactly what I think of him!"

"Oh, but you mustn't do that! It would make me so miserable. I want you to be kind to him, because he has suffered very much."

"And he deserves to have suffered!" He felt that he could not give Yolande up to this man without making a strong effort to retain her. Selfishly, perhaps, he had settled down to this

new and tranquil existence, never imagining that it did not supply all the demands of a beautiful woman hardly yet twenty years old. Was Gifford's coming to be allowed to destroy all his visions of a protracted peace? To lose Yolande and Ambrose now would be in the nature of a cataclysm, and he could not envisage such an untoward event.

In the end a note was written and sent down to the hotel, asking Gifford to come on the following morning. Nothing would induce Major Pascoe to invite him to luncheon—he was to receive no hospitality. The visit was to be a strictly business one. Eleven o'clock was the hour fixed upon, and at twelve Major Pascoe was determined that Gifford should be politely shown to the door.

Both men disliked all that they had known and heard of each other. To neither did the prospect of a meeting hold out anything but a grim duty to be performed. It was for Yolande's sake that they thus met. Gifford's face was set and stern when he entered the big spacious empty room, where Maxim Pascoe, according to immemorial custom, smoked and read his *New York Herald*. Yolande was sewing, her chair drawn up close to the opened window, beyond which was the loggia hung with trailing vines. The day was very warm, and she wore a white thin dress. She looked to him so poignantly like the girl who had driven with him demurely to church on her wedding-day. . . .

They both rose as he came in. Yolande introduced them. She said simply:

"Papa, this is Gifford."

Major Pascoe had hated Gifford with a violent hatred; he had thought hard and bitter things of him; he had longed to have an opportunity of fighting a duel with him—a duel to the death . . . but in that first moment of meeting he could not but acknowledge that there had been some reason for Yolande's rash marriage, seeing that the tempter had worn so splendidly handsome a guise.

"It is very kind of you to let me come!" he said. His eyes were blazing.

"My daughter persuaded me," said Maxim Pascoe briefly. "I have always said that you should never enter my house. But she tells me that changes have occurred in your position, and that you wished to discuss the matter. Will you sit down?"

He was changed for the better since the Boulogne days when Gifford had regretfully recognized the impossibility of introducing him at Merrywood. He held himself more erect; his appearance was extremely neat; his eye was clear; there was a pride and dignity about him which had been so lamentably lacking in the old days.

"I will come back presently," said Yolande. She left the room without bestowing another glance upon Gifford. She could not stay and hear what they had to say to each other, these two men both so grimly bent upon the possession of her. She would have to choose between them. All last night she had lain awake, and the music of Gifford's remembered voice was in her ears; his love seemed to enfold her; she knew how hard it had been to put the thought of him out of her

heart; to kill the love that had been so shameful a thing. . . .

"I came to see the child," said Gifford, standing there and taking no notice of the proffered chair. He felt that he could meet his foe better standing up. "I wanted to see him so much—our son." . . .

"She nearly died when he was born," said Maxim grimly, and he noticed that Gifford gave a quick little shudder as he heard the words. "I believe she wished to die. But she was just learning to be happy again—here with her baby. I did all I could to shield and protect her. No one knows her shameful story except the Marquise de Solignac."

Gifford broke in passionately:

"Her story isn't shameful! She is my wife, and Ambrose is our son! You are not a Catholic, and you know perfectly well that the only objection to our marriage is an ecclesiastical one. It was on those grounds she left me and hid from me. I tried to find her." . . .

"I am not a Catholic," said Maxim, "but my wife was, and I faithfully promised to bring Yolande up as one. You deceived her and the priest too—representing yourself as an unmarried man. You deceived her also as to the reason of your wish to keep the marriage secret. I know that no Catholic can succeed to your property, and that you would not dare take a Catholic wife to your home. You married her under false pretenses . . . and now you come and talk of taking her away!"

"She's my wife and I love her, Major Pascoe,"

said Gifford, "and the boy's mine. Even if you annul the marriage——"

"You cannot annul what was never a marriage!" said Maxim warmly.

"In England it is a legal marriage and Ambrose is my legitimate son! However much you may annul the legal tie, you cannot deprive me of my son. He is mine—I can claim him!" Through the black lashes his eyes were hard and bright as steel. "I've got that hold over Yolande. But I've got another hold over her which is more enduring. She loved me when she married me, and she loves me still. No one shall keep us apart!" His mind went back to those days in Devonshire last year; he was back on the moorland with her all through that warm and breathless July night, with the stars shining overhead and Yolande lying asleep, her head pillowed upon his arm. And when she had awakened the dawn was already coming towards them out of the east like a thin white flame. . . . Their happiness had been perfect while it lasted, and he could not believe that for a single moment she had ceased to love him.

"I love her," he said stubbornly; "you can't keep her from me. I am free now. I have work, and am independent of my father. I am a younger son, and there is no chance of my inheriting. She can bring up her child in her own religion if she wishes to. I am prepared to accept any conditions!"

It was as if he were reading, by some subtle process of thought-transference, the misgivings that were strongly agitating Maxim's mind.

"It is for her to choose," said Major Pascoe; "I cannot prevent her from marrying you if she wishes it. God knows I would never try and keep her from her happiness. But you—" he looked at Gifford with smoldering contempt, as if he had been a small and unclean creeping thing of the earth—"you deceived her—you lied to her. You dragged her down into the dust, making her go through a ceremony which you knew quite well wasn't for her a marriage at all. For her it was a sacrilege, and she had no choice but to leave you. She came back to me . . . it was a nice story for a father to hear! She wasn't your wife, and she was going to bear your child. . . . Who has sheltered—who has protected her all these months? Who was near her when she went down almost to the gate of death? Not you—you were only the man she had trusted, and who had brought her so low. How do I know you are speaking the truth now? Why have I any reason in the world to believe a single word you say?"

All the bitterness, the anger, the contempt, he had felt for Gifford seemed to be concentrated in the fury of this speech. Every word went home. He had no wish to spare him. Rather he desired to avenge Yolande for all the injuries she had suffered at this man's hands.

"The laws of her Church are nothing to me," said Gifford. "Of course, I knew that a young girl—a very young girl like Yolande—would in any case shrink from marrying a man who had divorced his wife. I was aware that such a marriage would probably meet with your disapproval. And, as I tell you, my father would

have objected on his side to my marrying a Catholic. Oh, I admit that I must seem to you unscrupulous . . . but I loved her. That is my only excuse. She was so beautiful, and I was afraid of losing her. And now she is more lovely than ever . . . and I can't give her up. I must have my wife and my son—and you can believe me at least when I say that I will spend my whole life in trying to make up to Yolande for all that she has gone through this last year!"

His voice sounded perfectly sincere. Maxim Pascoe looked at him with a vague surprise. Certainly he knew well how to plead his own cause; he was eloquent, eager; he had temperament. Yet with such fair words also he must have lured Yolande into a secret marriage; with such ardent eloquence he must have taught her to love him. With one at once so suave and so imperious Yolande must have been as a little trusting child, ready to do his bidding and to believe every one of his faithless words. . . .

"She shall put it in her confessor's hands," said Major Pascoe more calmly; "that is, if she wishes to return to you, which you must give me leave to doubt. She's learnt to be happy here with her child and myself. She has had tranquillity and peace."

"Why should she ask her confessor?" said Gifford angrily; "why should she consult any one but her own heart? If she loves me, nothing can keep us apart. And I tell you I know she loves me. She may have imagined she was happy here when she had persuaded herself that it was a sin to love me. But now she knows that I am

free——” He stopped and his eyes kindled. “I’m not going to let you or any priest keep her from me now!” he said, and there was a hint of menace in his tone.

They faced each other with renewed anger. Both faces were stern and determined. But while the major was red with rage Gifford was pale through all his sunburn, and his eyes were aflame.

At that moment the door opened and Yolande came quietly into the room. Their voices raised in anger had penetrated to her room, which was just overhead, and she thought it would be better to rejoin them. In her arms she was carrying the sleeping Ambrose.

She had dressed him in a little white muslin frock with pale blue bows; his legs and arms were bare—dimpled and rosy. His face was a little flushed. Small and rather frail-looking, with the loose dark rings of hair clustering over his forehead, his likeness to his mother was unmistakable.

Perhaps he was not quite what Gifford had expected him to be. He had imagined a more Anglo-Saxon-looking child, with rosy cheeks and a fair complexion and masses of flaxen hair—something, too, rather bigger and fatter. This ideal had no doubt been founded upon Robin Lumleigh, when he had come on his first visit to Merrywood. But Robin had been an unusually fine specimen for his age, and was what the nurses call a bonny child. Poor little Ambrose was in no sense bonny, and his rather dark and sallow skin deprived him of any claim to baby

prettiness. Gifford was, however, determined to betray nothing of his first chill feeling of disappointment. Without a word, but with a look of tremulous happiness, Yolande put Ambrose into his father's arms and watched as he bent down to kiss him.

"What a stunning little chap!" said Gifford. "He's awfully like you, Yolande." There was a lump in his throat, and in his eyes the unshed tears burnt and stung. He cuddled the baby close to him.

"Oh, but you mustn't smother him!" she said, laughing.

And then she suddenly realized that Gifford's being there made everything seem quite different and complete as it had never been before. The little scene was at once so simple and so intimate. She wondered how she could have been so long content without him. And as Maxim Pascoe watched the little group and saw the look of quiet serene happiness shining in his daughter's eyes, he knew that Gifford was going to defeat him in the contest. And had he not defeated him all those long months ago, when he had secretly stolen Yolande from him and made her his wife?

He felt angry, jealous, altogether out of it. They were laughing over their baby like any ordinary young married couple in the first joy of the first child. It was as if there had never been any tragedy at all. Their heads, bent so low over Ambrose who was now awake and staring at them with great solemn dark eyes, were close together—so close that a strand of Yolande's

hair drifted and touched Gifford's forehead. This was altogether too much for Maxim, and he left the room abruptly. And when he heard the door close Gifford put out his free hand and drew Yolande's face close to his. Their lips met in a long embrace. . . .

"So you do love me still?" he said wistfully.

"Yes, Gifford."

"And you'll come back to me?"

"If papa approves," she said; "I can't go against him. He has been so very good to me. But I know he wants me to be happy. I think we shall persuade him."

"He hates me," said Gifford morosely; "he doesn't want you to come back. But you *are* my wife, Yolande—and Ambrose is my son. There's no getting away from that." . . .

"Yes," she said; "he is your son, but he is mine too." She bent down and kissed the child's forehead. Ambrose smiled in the curious and experienced way of very small babies.

"Isn't he a little small for his age?" he asked.

"I don't know. Is he? I'm afraid I don't know much about little babies."

"Robin Lumleigh—my cousin's child—was much bigger at that age!"

"Oh, Gifford—I don't mind what size he is. He is such a darling, isn't he?" She bent over the child, murmuring words of tenderness. "Of course he wasn't very strong at first, but he is making good progress." She took the child in her arms and held him almost jealously.

"For his sake and for mine, Yolande, you will come back to me," said Gifford. "I must have

you both. I can't tell you what my life has been like without you this last year. It seemed I had only touched my happiness to find it melt away. And then when I was free . . . I could not find you. I think God must have taken pity on me at last and led me yesterday back to you." . . .

"But your father" . . . she said timidly; "what will he say? I was told that he would not approve of your marrying a Catholic?"

"What does it matter to him? I'm independent of him now. And why should we tell him?" He looked at her defiantly.

"Yes—if we marry you must tell him," she said firmly; "I am not going to have another secret wedding, Gifford. Your people must know—every one must know—that I am your wife. I will not have any more secrets, any more lies, any more deceit. I must be quite openly your wife."

"Very well," he said; "you can make any terms you like. It has come to that. I'm prepared to do everything you wish."

"And I must, of course, bring Ambrose up a Catholic," she said. "He was baptized one. And if we should have any other children they must also be Catholics."

"I suppose he can change his religion when he grows up, if he wants to and prefers to have the estates?" said Gifford.

Yolande drew a little away from him.

"I would rather see my son dead than an apostate, Gifford," she said. "You cannot be speaking seriously. You cannot quite realize what religion means to a Catholic."

"If a man is born to fulfil certain duties I believe that it is only right that he should not forego them. That will be a question for Ambrose himself to decide when he grows up, if there is any prospect of his becoming the heir."

"He will be too much my son to give it a second thought," said Yolande. "I can't give him much, but I can give him this. I shall make him a good Catholic—I shall teach him that nothing else matters in all the world!"

"Well, we needn't quarrel over that, Yolande. You shall bring him up just as you please, if that contents you. I've learned what life is like without you too well to put any hindrance in the way."

He watched her sitting there with Ambrose in her arms. Her face wore such a look of soft happiness and tenderness. After all—she had not perhaps suffered so much from the separation as he had done. She had had her child to comfort her. Yes—but what of those long months before Ambrose came? What of the day when she had gone to find her child, down at the very gates of death—returning with him, alive and triumphant . . . what of that day of supreme peril of which he had been in happy ignorance, knowing nothing of how it fared with her?

Everything was beautiful about her, he thought, the slim wrists, the long slender hands, the grace of her bearing at once girlish and dignified. She was immensely changed in the past year, but her beauty was now of a rarer quality than it had ever been. She had passed through

two crises—one mental and sorrowful, one physical and dangerous, yet touched with ineffable joys, and those experiences had subtly changed her.

“Only let me stay, Yolande,” he whispered; “don’t send me away. We can be married whenever you wish. I suppose your priest will insist upon repeating the ceremony. Oh, if only you weren’t a Catholic, my darling, you’d win my father’s heart and my mother’s too! They couldn’t help loving you and Ambrose! But they’ll never forgive me for marrying you because you are a Catholic, and there’s this dead-hand business in the family. We can’t get away from that or alter it. We shall be rather poor, for I’m not making much yet. You won’t mind that? For myself, I mind nothing as long as I have you with me—as long as you are my wife!”

He slipped his arm round her and kissed her. They were happy again, as they had been at Terre Haute in the Châlet des Pins.

“Will you let it be soon, Yolande?” he said.

“Yes, Gifford,” she said; “there are one or two things which must be settled, and you must come and see papa again; but I won’t let him be angry with you. I know he will wish to consult Mr. Prendergast, and I shall also want to consult my confessor. And you—shall you go home first, do you think, and tell Lord Strode? You see, there is quite a lot to do, and we must have everything quite clear and open. Then we might be married here—our wedding can be as quiet as you please. And perhaps now you will go away and leave me alone a little with papa.”

She came with him to the door and kissed him gravely as he bade her farewell. Then still holding Ambrose in her arms she stood in the sunny loggia, watching him as he disappeared down the path between the avenues of date-palms that shone so vividly green against the blue Italian sky.

CHAPTER XIX

GIFFORD felt an immense reluctance to go home and see his father. He had only once been back to Merrywood since his marriage, and then he had told them nothing at all about it. His welcome had been a very chilly one, and he was glad when he could in decency leave. He had really only gone on his mother's account, and because it was customary for him to spend Christmas at home.

Now there would have to be explanations. He felt that Yolande had a perfect right to make this hard condition. They would have to go and live in London after their marriage, and it would be impossible to keep it a secret. Besides, such a course would be wholly inadvisable.

In the meantime he remained at San Giuliano, and the friends with whom he was yachting accepted his rather lame excuse for leaving them without any manifestation of curiosity.

Major Pascoe did not invite him to stay at the villa, and he took up his quarters at the hotel. But he visited Yolande every day.

Major Pascoe had communicated with his lawyer, and asked him to come out and see them, if possible, in three weeks' time. It was supposed that about that time Gifford would depart for England to have the momentous interview with his father. Yolande had written to her old di-

rector, asking his advice and putting the matter with much detail before him. So for the time being the question of marriage remained in abeyance.

It was, however, tacitly agreed that the ceremony should take place immediately after Gifford's return from Merrywood—probably about the end of October. Then after a fortnight's honeymoon they would go and take up their abode in London, for by that time Gifford's holiday would be at an end.

Major Pascoe, finding that Yolande's happiness was so definitely involved, made no further objection, and even began to discover things to like in Gifford. It was too late to think whether he were worthy of her. But he was the father of her child; there was the existing legal tie, and, if she married at all, it was desirable that she should marry him. The affair was already so complicated that if anything could be done to legalize her position he felt that it ought certainly to be done.

Not that Maxim wished to lose his daughter. He would have to shape his own life anew, and he dreaded to think that his feet might be led back to the old and fatal primrose paths. The villa must be given up, and fresh plans made for poor Tibby. Then there was the religious disability which would prevent any child of Yolande's from succeeding to the estates. Her firmness on this point was quite unchangeable. The dead hand of Veronica was at least as powerful as the dead hand of the first Lord Strode. Not for all the world would Veronica's child allow her own son

to be brought up in any other faith. Long ago, when he had knelt beside his wife's coffin, Major Pascoe had spun a web fine and strong, enmeshing child and grandchild in spiritual bonds that could not easily be broken.

Miss Tibbit was silent. She was against Gifford; against the marriage. The man's winning personality failed to make any appeal to her. She did not trust him, and she knew that nothing he could do or say would ever make her trust him. She felt that he would promise everything—anything—to win Yolande. She did not say a word of this to any one, but Yolande knew perfectly well that Tibby disliked Gifford even more, perhaps, than she had expected to do, and a slight atmosphere of constraint sprang up between them in consequence. She was sorry for this, as it would make it impossible for her to have Tibby with her in the future when she was settled in England. She would have liked to have had her, as she was so devoted to Ambrose, and because she herself could hardly imagine a life without Tibby.

Gifford was always received at the villa on a formal footing. Even Yolande, after his first visit, was colder to him. They sat together and talked, and watched Ambrose, but he could not induce her to speak much of the future. She gave him to understand that nothing could be regarded as settled until after his visit to England. There were days when he felt he should go away at once, and get the interview with his father over, and come back and claim her. The slight uncertainty, the hint of hesitation that showed itself

in her manner to him, perplexed and bewildered him. Sometimes they walked together through the flaming chestnut woods that were so beautiful in these days of early October; sometimes they wandered through the little white village and watched the lace-makers at work. Gifford was much less happy than Yolande during those weeks at San Giuliano. The hopeless anomaly of his position poisoned his enjoyment of those lovely early autumn days. He was in love with his own wife, and she denied that she was his wife. She was the mother of his child, and she refused to recognize his own legal claim. Day after day he told himself that he could bear it no longer—that he would go away, and leave a situation that was galling and humiliating and rapidly becoming intolerable. It hurt him inexpressibly to see how simply Yolande accepted things as they were. Her coldness, her hesitancy, the way she abstained from making any plans for the future, made him ask himself again and again if she loved him; if, indeed, she had ever loved him. And as long as he stayed at San Giuliano he was aware that no definite plans could be made. That was all part of the hard conditions she had laid down. He shrank from the thought of revealing this fresh matrimonial imbroglio to his father. There would be a scene, of course, followed almost certainly by a definite rupture, perhaps, indeed, by a prohibition forbidding him ever to show his face at Merrywood again. The prospect of his father's cold and bitter anger, his mother's tears, Rex's barbed ironies—all made him inclined to postpone the evil day. And here

Yolande's increasing coldness, her lack of enthusiasm about the future, made his presence anything but pleasant. She was absorbed in Ambrose, and he believed sometimes that the child now occupied the first place in her heart. Her utter disregard of the boy's temporal welfare in regard to the family property was another source of irritation. She had quite definitely told him there could be no concessions on this point. And with this knowledge how could he even attempt to conciliate his father? A ready-made Catholic grandson was perhaps the last person in the whole world to be welcome at Merrywood. But Gifford's love for Yolande triumphed. He told himself that he loved her now far more than he had ever done; he could not bring himself to forego one of those bright and beautiful Italian days.

They were walking towards the headland of Porto Fino. The day was brilliantly fine and the sun very hot. The white road was almost as thick with dust as in summer time. The sea lying below was calm and sapphire-colored: the sky stretched above was singularly clear and cloudless.

"My father has written quite politely to ask me to go and stay at Merrywood," he said. The letter had come that morning, and had been rather a surprise. Though brief, it had evidently been intended as an olive-branch.

"I suppose you will go," she said.

Her eyes watched a dainty little felucca that was leaving the harbor with outspread butterfly sails.

"I sometimes think I'd almost better," he said half savagely; "it is no good my remaining here." . . .

"No good?"

She had wondered a little at his growing gloom during the past few days.

"I mean—the way you treat me! I might be the veriest stranger!"

She said gravely:

"But you have seen me every day."

"It is absurd," he said; "and my position is anomalous and unbearable. You are my wife." . . .

"No—I am not your wife, Gifford," she said. "And it is very difficult for me to know what to do. Whichever way we settle the future there are innumerable complications to be faced. Sometimes, indeed, I have thought it would be easier and simpler for me to stay here as I am, with papa and Tibby and the baby. It will only add to your home difficulties to marry a Catholic wife. I am willing to put myself aside for your sake."

"Do you know what you are telling me, Yolande?" he burst forth.

"Telling you?"

"What I have long suspected—that you don't want me any more—that you don't love me!"

She did not answer.

"I love you more—every day! And you don't care a straw for me—you'd just as soon I went home and never came back!"

She looked at him with kind, grave eyes.

How was it that now she always felt so much older than Gifford? Last year she had felt almost like a child beside him, and had shown a child's submission and docility.

"You created the position. It isn't easy for either of us. But mine is very much worse than yours, Gifford. Do you think it was a very happy day when I told my father all our story? He was kind because—well, he is always kind—and he was sorry for me; but I am his only child, and I could not help seeing how deeply he felt it. I owe him a great deal—and I am not sure if it would not be very selfish to leave him now."

"The fact is," he said, "you find you don't care for me any more. At first—when I first came—I believed that you did love me. I thought it all the more when you put Ambrose into my arms. I have done everything I could to smooth the path. I have literally cut the ground from under my feet as regards my future prospects by making those promises. I've deprived my son of his possible heritage by agreeing to your conditions. And yet you are not satisfied. You are still hesitating—still wondering"—his eyes as well as his scornful tone mocked her—"if you can leave papa and Tibby!"

Yolande flushed.

"You are cruel to speak like that," she said; "I have so much to consider. Ambrose's future—as well as my own!"

Before them the road stretched out white and empty. Gifford turned suddenly and put his arms round her. "Yolande—Yolande—you do

love me, don't you? You are not going to desert me?" He kissed her, but she freed herself quickly. She was sobbing.

"You don't trust me? You don't trust me—is that it?" he said. "You think I'm not going to keep my word? They've been telling you that?"

"Why should we trust you?" she said.

Gifford reddened. So that was it—she could not forget how he had once duped her. She was unwilling to place herself in his power again. He believed that she was now completely under the influence of other advisers. And at first she had seemed to care—at first she had seemed willing to cement the bonds that had once held them.

"It is on account of Ambrose that you are hesitating?"

"Gifford—do not let us say harsh things to each other. Believe me when I tell you I am trying to do what is best for us all."

She walked on quickly. He followed her looking beaten and cowed. All the time he was saying to himself: "If I choose I can punish her by taking Ambrose away. Ambrose is my son!" She did not speak again, but when they reached the gate of the villa she turned and held out her hand.

"Good-by," she said; "I think we had better not meet perhaps for a day or two. But I will write." . . .

Her face was cold and impassive. His heart sank.

"And if you think it well, perhaps you will go to Merrywood soon, and see your father and tell

him? That will help us to come to a decision. No—do not kiss me, please.”

Two days passed and she made no sign. Her silence still further exasperated him. They had been so near to quarreling; and he began to feel less sure of her than he had ever done before. She had the whip hand of him, and she used her power without remorse and pitilessly—this girl of nineteen! But he did not go away. He waited on at San Giuliano in a state of morose gloom and despondency. He was so humbled that he desired only to see her—to hear her voice. He was exiled from her presence, and the thought tortured him.

On the third day her letter came. It was very short and she enclosed a longer one from Mr. Prendergast, who, it seemed, had now arrived at the Villa Viola. The lawyer's letter set forth quite clearly the terms upon which Yolande had decided to become his wife, after he had been home and seen his father. They were exactly what he expected, but seeing them for the first time in cold and legal phraseology, he became poignantly aware of the sacrifices they entailed. For his own son he was compelled to renounce the fair heritage of the Strodes, should this ever come to him. Never had he hated the Catholic Church as he then hated it for its power to despoil his children of their rights. It effectually also annulled the prospect of any eventual reconciliation with his own people. But nothing was now too hard for him. He bent his back to the blow. Her power was complete. He told himself again

that he loved her far, far more than he had ever done. Love compelled surrender. Mr. Pendergast suggested that he should come up to the Villa Viola that afternoon, and have an interview with him and Major Pascoe. He was just going to write a reply in the affirmative when a telegram was brought to him. So highly strung were his nerves that he felt, as he opened it, that in some unknown manner it was to be the arbiter of his destiny. . . .

It was from his father, and bore the Merrywood postmark, and it told him that Rex was dead. "The result of an accident"—beyond that Lord Strode vouchsafed no details. "Return without delay."

CHAPTER XX

GIFFORD looked out of his window. Beyond the loggia, over which the scarlet and gold of the fading vine-leaves showed in their vivid autumn glory, he could see the smiling blue sea, the delicately-colored mountains that fringed the shore southward, forming that succession of little turquoise-hued bays—like jewels in a necklace—cut by the white and brown butterfly sails of the fishing-boats; and the lustrous green of the palms that made such a thick stripe of darkness between him and the shore. It was mid-afternoon, the sun was still shining fiercely; the glare from the water hurt his eyes.

Letter and telegram lay open on the table at his side, and to his tortured and morbid fancy they seemed to be like two strong and cruel hands each pulling him in an opposite direction. There was the letter which offered him love—the fulfilment of the heart's desire, the passionate realization of a dream once known and since bitterly frustrated; and there was the telegram which meant for him wealth, position, a place in the world which his son might never enjoy after him.

Yes—it had not been without reason, this fancy that the telegram was to serve as some sudden arbiter of a destiny none too smooth and easy. He remembered how he had often envied Rex his

birthright; how as a little boy he had been jealous of those privileges his brother had enjoyed because he was the elder, and how he had sometimes longed to be in his place. And Rex had never tried to make things easier for him. Four years older, he had alternately patronized him and bullied him. He had jeered at him when he had been punished, and had sometimes even been instrumental in bringing about that punishment. At the time of the divorce he had never spared him those bitter ironical words of which he was a past master. Gifford remembered, too, how he had referred to the affair of Yolande. And now he was dead. . . . He wondered what had been the manner of that death. Sudden . . . an accident . . . how had Lord Strode borne such a blow? He had always adored Rex. And already Gifford stood in his place. He was the heir. He would be Lord Strode: Merrywood would be his in the time to come. And the money—there was already a great deal of money which he would inherit immediately—which belonged to the heir, if a son, directly he came of age. Rex had for the last eight or nine years been in possession of an income of between five and six thousand a year. This would make him a rich man, independent of his father. A sense of exultation came over him. He was free . . . he could do just as he chose. And as this thought came to his mind like bubbling wine he suddenly remembered the dead hand that so clutched him and his . . . and he shivered, in spite of the heat. He rang the bell, and ordered some brandy and soda to be brought to him. When it came he poured

out a stiff glass and drank it. It revived him, and went a little to his head. Yes . . . the gods—there was a proverb—never gave with both hands. Their gifts were grudging, restricted, limited. . . .

He must go home. Perhaps this very day. He had a great longing to shake off this idleness, this inertia which had seized him. And he resolved not to see Yolande again before he went. She would prevent him from looking at his altered position with an open mind. She weakened his will. Her little hands were so powerful to hold him, even as they had been strong to thrust him from her side through long months of determined separation. She had played with him as a child plays with a ball. But now she should not play with him any more. Other things were offered to him—wonderful, precious, and beautiful things. And Rex was dead. . . . How could he be sorry? He had never pretended to like him. On the contrary, he had often hated him with a savage, vindictive hatred. He was not sorry now—he was glad. He should not say so—that would be bad taste—but he would not pretend to mourn.

He wrote a few lines to Mr. Prendergast, telling him he had been called suddenly home, but would make an effort to see him later in London. To Yolande he wrote briefly, telling her of the telegram, and saying that he was leaving San Giuliano immediately. There would be no time to come and see her, but he would write from Merrywood Place as soon as possible.

Yolande showed the note to Tibby.

"What does it mean?" she said. She felt as if a cold cloud had come up, blotting out Gifford's figure. She had felt so sure that he would come eagerly at the suggestion of Mr. Prendergast, and hasten the preliminaries for their marriage. She had missed him very much during the past three days, and, womanlike, she had already repented of her coldness towards him. She had made sure that he would come quickly, to hold her in his arms and kiss her, and fondle Ambrose in that tender way he had. This letter so short, so bare of expressions of affection, startled and alarmed her.

"He's upset perhaps on account of his brother's death," suggested Tibby. "Was he very fond of him?"

"I don't think so—he never spoke of him as if he were," said Yolande. Could one never depend on him? Would he always prove this creature of varying moods, of sudden and wayward impulses?

"Well, he is in a very different position now," said Susan Tibbit; "and he will have to think it well over."

"But I wish he had come to say good-by, Tibby. Why didn't he?" She was perplexed and saddened at the news of his departure.

If he had been in great grief, was not that an additional reason for his coming to her? She would have tried to comfort him. . . .

"Perhaps it means that he didn't like Mr. Prendergast's letter, and that he doesn't mean to

comply," said Tibby. Temptation was too strong and she added:

"I never thought he would. He is weak, Yolande—weak, that's what he is. He's got his beauty and nothing more! You're best quit of him!"

Yolande slid down to the floor, and did what she had done so often as a little girl when things had gone awry. She hid her face in Tibby's lap and wept, while Tibby, with large and kindly hand, stroked the soft masses of silken black hair.

"Oh, Tibby—he can't be going to leave me for always! It has been such a fight for me—between my love for him and my duty to Ambrose. And I was horrid to him the other day—I was trying not to show how much I still cared. But when Mr. Prendergast said that he had got a claim on Ambrose, and had the power also to take him away from me and educate him as he chose—I couldn't help seeing that it was best for every one I should go back to him, and be his wife. And now he has gone without even seeing me!" Piti-ful sobs shook her slender body. If Gifford could have seen her then he would have been more than satisfied as to the depth of her love for him. "What shall I do, Tibby—what shall I do? It will kill me to lose him now!"

"Well, you haven't lost him yet," said Tibby a trifle grimly. "It may be that he thought he'd better go off straight like that, and think things out a bit alone. And he was going to Merry-wood in any case." . . .

"But, don't you see, Tibby—there would have

been so much time for him to come up here before the train goes?"

Miss Tibbit shrugged her shoulders, as if to indicate that the ways of men were beyond her, and that for her part she was thankful to have evaded the complications of love and matrimony. But in her heart she was thinking: "He has slipped off, as I knew he would, when it came to the point. He'll get rid of her and Baby." She did not dare say this aloud; besides, she was genuinely sorry for Yolande.

"We must try and think of him as mourning for his brother," said Tibby at last.

Yolande rose unsteadily and moved across the room, letter in hand.

"Papa will be angry," she said; "and I am sorry, because he was just beginning to like Gifford. He spoke quite favorably of him to Mr. Prendergast, and said he thought he had been mismanaged as a boy, which is quite true, you know, Tibby."

Over the bay the seagulls were flying like winged and silver scimitars. The superb headland of Porto Fino divided the blue of sea and sky. The place was so beautiful, yet it could bring this blinding misery. Not a fortnight ago Gifford had come back to her . . . and now he had gone. He had returned the ardent eager lover she had always known; he had departed the capricious, selfish man, seeking only his own pleasure. She remembered how he had taken her in his arms during that last walk, and kissed her roughly, fiercely. She had not seen him since that day. She had felt almost afraid of him then.

Were the conditions too hard? Was his love too weak to make sacrifices when it came to the point? Or had his new position, and the thought of all that it would bring, blinded him temporarily to lesser considerations?

There was a little paragraph in the *New York Herald* a day or two later, which gave a brief account of Reginald Lumleigh's death. Yolande read it over many times:

"We regret to announce the death of the Honorable Reginald John Victor Lumleigh, elder son and heir of Lord Strode, of Merrywood Place, Sussex, in his twenty-ninth year. He was killed on Tuesday last, having met with an accident while out riding. His horse stumbled and fell, and deceased received a fractured skull, and never recovered consciousness. He was unmarried, and the next heir is his younger brother, the Honorable John Denis Gifford Lumleigh, who is now in his twenty-fifth year."

Indeed, if Gifford had wished to give Yolande a lesson in the reading of her own heart he could not have managed the business more deftly than by going away suddenly, and without expressing regret at not being able to bid her farewell. She reproached herself for her treatment of him—yet how could she have acted otherwise? At first, when he came, it had seemed quite simple and natural that they should see each other often, and that he should be there with her and her child; but as the days wore on she saw that as long as she wavered about the future, it became more neces-

sary to maintain that formal footing which her father had always urged. Then had come Mr. Prendergast's visit, and his view that the marriage should certainly be made ecclesiastically valid, since otherwise Ambrose would be at a great disadvantage when he grew older and went to school. At school, at college, wherever he went in the world, he would inevitably suffer as the unrecognized son of Gifford Lumleigh. He would not be able to escape questioning, and it would mean for him a little purgatory. And at present she was evidently in a position to dictate final terms to Gifford, in order to safeguard Ambrose's religion. On the other hand, he told her frankly that Gifford might take steps to annul his marriage, and claim the custody of the boy, supposing she refused to be his wife. The deed was done, the letter written—and its first result had been to send Gifford away in headlong flight. Major Pascoe was especially indignant at this counter-move. Elusive and slippery, even his ardent love for Yolande seemed insufficient to hold him, now that his own circumstances were so changed. The modern temperament, so impatient of ties and restraints, was beyond Maxim's comprehension. He had himself been no shining example of stability, but in comparison with Gifford he was as the solid rock.

There was nothing to be done; they could only await with patience the letter thus promised. Meantime Major Pascoe tried to comfort his daughter by assuring her that Rex's death must have been a great shock to him, and that at such moments family differences were often forgotten,

and Gifford's first thoughts would naturally be for his bereaved and stricken parents. Gifford, as the heir of Lord Strode, was a very different personage from Gifford, the younger son, the "scamp" of the family. He had wealth at his command—would have independent means sufficient to support a wife and family, and to make provision for his Catholic children, who were debarred from inheriting. It was to be seen whether he would choose this course. Mr. Prendergast had come out extremely well informed as to these matters and he was in a position to tell them exactly how far Gifford would benefit by his brother's death. Yolande was, of course, convinced that Gifford would come back and claim her directly the funeral was over. Major Pascoe was unable to predict anything, and Tibby, who said nothing, was tacitly certain that they had seen the last of young Lumleigh. He would take steps to annul the marriage—which for her had never been a marriage at all—and he would choose a wife who had none of those disabilities that belonged to Yolande, and whose sons could inherit the property, even if Ambrose should keep them out of the title.

CHAPTER XXI

MEANWHILE the subject of so many hopes and fears had returned to Merrywood Place, not this time as the Prodigal emerging from long obscurity and a lean diet of husks, but as the only surviving son and heir. And as the very fact of kingship produces a certain dignity in the puniest and most insignificant of men, so did the consciousness of his position endow Gifford with the qualities necessary to sustain it in the eyes of that little dominion. His face was set and grave; his voice subdued, his lips were firmly compressed; he entered the house of mourning with a becoming air of dignified, if restrained, sorrow.

Lord Strode, who had adored his eldest son, was completely broken down. He held out his hand to Gifford, and sobbed without any effort to subdue his grief. That a man, so cynical and apparently heartless, could cry thus like a child astonished Gifford, who murmured broken sentences of condolence and sympathy. Yet he felt awkward and embarrassed at this spectacle of a proud, reserved man, literally humbled to the dust by grief. As soon as he could, he made an excuse for leaving him, and with feelings of mingled curiosity and fear, went up to Rex's room, where he understood the coffin had been placed.

A very long and narrow coffin rested upon a draped bier in the obscurity of the shuttered room, which was lit only by two tall candles that Lady Strode had ordered to be placed there. She had hesitated before adopting this custom which she felt to be Romish, but considered that some ceremony was necessary to mark the position of her dead son. She, too, had loved him, but with perhaps a lesser love than that which she had given to Gifford. But her grief was frozen, and she had no tears. She sat there quite near one of the candles, alternately praying and reading her Bible. She did not pray for the repose of Rex's soul—that was a Popish custom arguing a belief in the pernicious doctrine of Purgatory which her Prayer-book condemned—yet once it had occurred to her that there might be consolation in the practice. It distressed her now as never before to know that her husband had no belief at all in a future life. The Resurrection of the Body—the Resurrection of the Dead—were alike meaningless terms to him. He sorrowed as one without hope. . . .

As Gifford advanced slowly into the room an almost eerie feeling crept over him. Something of his old fear and dislike and dread of Rex returned. He, nevertheless, went softly up to the coffin and uncovered his brother's face.

He started back in terror, for Rex's head was bound in white cloth, which concealed the wounds that had been fatal. But a dark jagged streak cutting across both finely drawn eyebrows was, however, visible. The thin white face, with the narrow nose and high cheek-bones, seemed so

much smaller than it had ever done in life, and was curiously pale and changed. Purged of everything of sense and flesh, the mask of clay seemed to Gifford almost a travesty of Rex, resembling more a waxen caricature than anything else. The features were almost effeminate-looking. The lips so quick to gibe and jeer were compressed into a grave and mysterious reticence. The strong, slender, well-shaped hands were shrunk, too, in their pallor; one could not now guess at the cruel strength that had once informed them, making their clutch like a steel spring. . . .

For the first time Gifford felt a strange emotion. Although the brothers had hated each other, the inevitable tie of blood had given to them those innumerable, intimate, trivial bonds of mutual hereditary interests and associations, which even hatred cannot destroy or sever. Rex had always been part of his life; and if he had also belonged to its stormier, less pleasant side, he was, nevertheless, linked to a thousand memories of childhood, boyhood, manhood. Ever since he could remember anything, he could recall that proud, spoilt, indulged, wilful boy to whom so many things were permitted that were forbidden to himself. And Rex was dead. . . . He longed for him to speak. He had a wish that was almost pain to hear his cold, measured, ironical voice uttering its chilling, scornful sarcasms—even if they should be at his own expense. The sudden crushing of life out of that fine and beautiful human form in the zenith of its manhood seemed to Gifford a wanton cruelty. It was one

of those sacrifices which appeared to lead to nothing. He wished that Rex could have lived. He felt that he did not want the kind of independence and freedom that his brother's death had bestowed upon him. That wealth, that position, only increased his own already heavy responsibilities. It was a golden chain that fettered him. It was like Rex to die now. At no other moment could his legacies have been so fraught with cynical generosity. He gave at the time when Gifford was least able to receive. It increased his own difficulties a thousandfold. He felt almost as if the room had suddenly echoed with Rex's mocking, mirthless laughter.

And then for the first time since he had entered that abnormally hushed and silent room his thoughts turned to Yolande. Was this marble shape to be the means of dividing him forever from the woman he so profoundly loved, and from the son she had borne to him in such extremity of peril? The darkness faded away, and he seemed to be standing again in the abrupt white sunlight of the South; he saw the pale road winding like a sinuous ribbon from San Giuliano towards Porto Fino; he saw the blue sky and the blue sparkling waters of the bay, and Yolande was beside him; he held her in his arms. Was that kiss to be the last? Was he to set her aside because of his new duties, his new responsibilities? As these very questions had hastened his so precipitate departure from San Giuliano, so they now took possession of his thoughts. . . . It was her fault; she had made the conditions too hard. Not too hard for Gif-

ford Lumleigh, the younger son, but too hard for Lord Strode's only surviving son and heir. Her cold prudence, her unyielding, uncompromising attitude seemed to alienate her from this new Gifford. . . . His father's abandoned grief, his mother's bitter, frozen silence had deeply impressed him, and had awakened a certain solicitude in his heart for them both. He could not add any further burden to their heavy sorrow. Since Rex was dead they had only himself to look to; he was the sole hope of the house. He had yet to win their confidence. He had often failed and disappointed them. He made a kind of tacit resolution to be a dutiful son in future, to respect their wishes, to set himself aside. And Yolande belonged to that other life which was already beginning to seem dim and far away, losing in perspective some of its bright detail—that self-seeking life which Rex's death had so abruptly ended. And the thought of Yolande was already tinged with bitterness, as if he must teach himself to hate first that which he intended deliberately to hurt. Had she not left him decisively, definitely, in the midst of their first wedded happiness? He recalled his agonizing struggle to find her after the death of his first wife, and how she had persistently eluded him; those months of unbroken silence which had so chilled and saddened him; her denial of her very wifehood, her iron determination to keep the boy in her own hands at any cost. Looking back upon these things, away from the very sensible glamour of her beautiful presence, her character seemed to him strangely devoid of tenderness.

While she professed love for him—and in those passionate and beautiful bridal days she had most surely loved him—she would not move one step to meet him, to make things easier for him.

And now Rex had left him to deal with this dilemma, to solve an apparently insoluble problem. As he watched the faint flicker of a smile seemed to part those frozen, colorless lips. Drops of perspiration stood on Gifford's brow. How old Rex looked—so much older than he had ever done in life. It was as if this death, of whose approach, of whose agony, he had known nothing—if the doctors were to be believed—had yet bestowed upon him some definite cognizance and perception of its immense and overwhelming experience.

He had never imagined that Rex would die so young. He had always thought of him as living to be an old man, with his children and grandchildren about him, carrying on in his own person the iron rule of his father over great and small at Merrywood. Yet he had never seemed to envisage the desirability of marrying; that suggested alliance with Lady Kathleen Purflete had flickered out long ago, and he had never softened to the advances of Lamorna.

Lady Strode sat there without stirring. She seemed, indeed, hardly conscious of Gifford's presence. His disturbing thoughts communicated none of their unrest to her. She was absorbed in her own grief, the mother's grief for her first-born.

Gifford went noiselessly out of the room and upstairs to his own apartments. They were

already prepared, but in the gloom of those drawn blinds he could distinguish little. There was a tantalus on the table, and he poured some brandy into a glass and filled it from a syphon. His nerves were shattered by all he had gone through—the sudden shock, the anguish of leaving Yolande, the long train-journey, when he had been jolted and shaken for nearly twenty-four hours, the sad home-coming. As he sat there drinking, his father opened the door and came into the room.

Lord Strode had regained something of composure, though the traces of his two-days' old grief were still visible upon his face. He looked aged and broken, and in some sense weakened.

"My dear boy," he said, "my dear Gifford—it is a great comfort to have you back, both to your mother and myself. You could not have been here in time to see your dead brother alive. He only lived five hours, and he did not know any of us. You will stay with us now, I am sure . . . until you marry. And, in the meantime, you must take your place as the eldest son . . . the heir. I am getting an old man, Gifford, and there are many things regarding the property and estate which you will have to know now. Wealth is always a responsibility—in your case a very great responsibility. But I am sure you will do your duty. You have a clean sheet now. The poor thing you married is dead, and you must be particularly careful to avoid another mistake. There is nothing to prevent your making a brilliant marriage now, Gifford."

During this long speech his pale eyes were fixed almost hungrily upon his son—this son whom he had never loved and upon whom he had yet to learn to rely.

Gifford's face flushed a little. How could he ever tell him of Yolande—of Ambrose? How could he still further wound that grief-stricken heart? He cleared his throat, and after a moment's hesitation answered gravely:

"I shall do my best, father. I am afraid I have done nothing so far to merit your confidence. But now . . . although I can never make up to you for the loss of Rex I will try and do my duty."

He meant every word of it, just as he had certainly meant every eager word of love he had uttered to Yolande. He had no intention of deceiving either her or his father. The perfidy of his nature was much too deep-seated a thing; he was false without realizing it.

"My dear boy—we haven't always understood each other. But we must change that now. Our great common loss must knit us more closely together. Your youth was perhaps to blame, and then Rex was singularly perfect, he was everything a son could be, and never gave us an hour's anxiety. That made me impatient—perhaps a little hard—with you, because you fell short of that standard Rex had set. He was an ideal son; he seemed to anticipate our wishes. It isn't the time to discuss business matters now, and you must be tired after your long journey; but after the funeral Hurrell will come down

and explain everything very clearly to you. It will give you a lot of work, for Rex has taken a good deal off my shoulders of late years."

"I have never had much head for business," said Gifford, "but of course I'll do my best. I've been working for a firm in town for more than a year now, so I have learnt something. I'll try and not disappoint you."

Lord Strode paused as if trying to make up his mind to approach a difficult and delicate subject.

"Ah, I suppose you took that up when you went off in that headstrong way last year?" The epoch seemed to him so remote that he had almost lost sight of the reason for Gifford's abrupt departure. Then, as if following up a train of thought, he continued slowly, as if afraid to probe an ancient sore:

"And that girl at Boulogne, Gifford? I hope you have quite broken with her? No more correspondence, or any talk of an engagement? You will have to be most careful in future to avoid that kind of entanglement." . . .

Gifford faced his father with frank eyes, and lied as he had learned to lie when he was a little boy, when his sole motive had been to save his skin.

"Oh, that's quite over, father," he said. And he added: "Ages ago."

"I'm very glad indeed to hear that, Gifford. God bless you, my boy."

And with an air of relief that he could not suppress Lord Strode went out of the room. His face wore a much happier aspect. But he did

not look back at his son, who watched him as he went away with a face that seemed suddenly turned to stone. That was the face, hard, impenetrable, which Gifford Lumleigh was destined to show in future to friend and enemy alike. It was the face of a man who has locked up a secret within his heart, and turned the key. . . .

CHAPTER XXII

OCTOBER had nearly come to an end. There were beautiful days at Merrywood, almost summerlike in their warmth, days of wonderful pale sunshine and soft south caressing winds stealing from the sea across the boldly-designed downs. The chestnuts were for the most part bare, but then had they not been almost the first to put forth their green pyramids of flame to greet the spring? The elms were still green, and the elms at the Place were immense and splendid. Through their spreading, stately boughs the blue and white spaces of the sky seemed full of wind and light. Only the leaves were no longer so close and thick and secretive as in summer; the details of the branches were more visible in their warm purple outlines, and here and there the foliage had turned yellow and seemed to toss golden blossoms to laugh at the sun. The grass in the Park was vividly emerald, with piles of russet coppery leaves flung down in careless largess by the chestnuts and beeches.

Directly the funeral was over—a stately ceremonious funeral attended by half the county—Gifford began to realize the change in his own circumstances and importance. He was a Somebody, instead of being a detrimental and unsatisfactory Nobody. It was natural that just at

first it should go to his head. But his reckless days were passed. A cold prudence informed his words and actions. If he thought of Yolande during those first weeks it was with a feeling akin to fear that she might take him at his word—that word so often given. But as a rule he put the thought of her away from him. He stood in Rex's place, and to a man who has had nothing the first consciousness of wealth and importance is by no means unpleasant, and it must be said that he enjoyed those prerogatives which had automatically descended to him. This was his life, and if he ever felt that life had cheated him, dragging him thus from Yolande's side, he wasted then but little time in idle regrets.

He was very busy, and with the new responsibilities came a decided wish to please his father, to be a model son. He set himself to play that part which Lord Strode had indicated to him when he first returned after his brother's death. The weeks slipped by; he listened to the long legal explanations of Mr. Hurrell, the family solicitor; he learned all the details of the estate; in short, he did all that was expected and required of him, wearing still that frozen, imperturbable face which gave no hint of any interior struggle.

So a month passed, and gradually his thoughts were won back, in spite of himself, to that forbidden land—the Villa Viola at San Giuliano.

Yolande was silent—as, indeed, she had always been. No letters came to disturb him—letters that at first he had feared might come, and for which he subsequently learned to long with a

sickening suspense. But she made no effort to call him back. In this she puzzled him, because she had seemed on the point of yielding—on her own terms—when he had left San Giuliano. He began again to doubt her love. Did she love him? Not enough to renounce anything for him. Not enough to give him a free hand with his son. He was unsettled, silent, almost morose; he felt enclosed by a bleak pall of ice that chilled body and soul. Yet he did not wish as yet overmuch to return to Yolande. The complications were too vast, too intricate. While his parents were still in such deep distress he could not bring them further pain. He could not sacrifice them to Yolande. Sometimes he was angry with her, and cruel in his anger, determining to go and claim his son and bring her to her knees. Then he would soften again and let the days slip by. . . .

“He must marry as soon as possible,” said Lord Strode to his wife. “That dreadful woman is dead, poor thing! and he can marry where he chooses. I think, perhaps, that Lady Kathleen Purflete . . . you know we hoped once that Rex” . . . He sighed.

“Oh, I don’t think he would ever take a fancy to Cat,” said Lady Strode, looking up sorrowfully.

She knew that Lady Kathleen had been in love with Gifford—as far as she was capable of being in love with any one—since she first came out. And she was equally sure that Gifford would never give her a second thought. She

was not pretty, and she had no charm, but she was simple, unaffected, a little noisy, and a thoroughly good sportswoman. She had plenty of money, and would certainly make an excellent wife, but not for Gifford. He must marry only where he loved. . . .

She knew—though her husband did not—that this Gifford was a stranger. The passionate, reckless boy had become a controlled, reticent man. She felt that he had retreated, shell within shell. For this she blamed his early training, which had had the effect of destroying his candor. She knew nothing about him. He was a sealed book—this quiet man who sat at meat with them day by day, doing the things that Rex had always done, automatically and without any enthusiasm. She had the impression that he hated doing them, and that his heart, his soul, were elsewhere. Elsewhere? She had no key. The girl at Boulogne—the last of his many flirtations of which anything at all definite had been known? He had assured his father that that was a past episode, over and done with before Rex's death. His divorced wife was dead. On the face of it his prospects were golden enough. And he moved and spoke like a scarcely animated mask.

One night, finding him alone in the library, she went up to him, and, putting her arms round his neck, she kissed him. He was standing near the window; she had to draw his face down to hers. It was so unusual for her to display any affection that he turned in surprise and said: "What is the matter, mother?" in a tone so cold it chilled her.

She flushed. "Dear—I was wondering what you were thinking of."

"Only of the stars," he said, pointing to those golden lamps, shining through and above the elms that stood just beyond the sunk fence.

She said: "They are beautiful to-night," and waited, yearning for him to speak.

But he did not speak; his young, hard, restless eyes, dark under their black lashes, gazed straight in front of him.

When he spoke again he only said:

"I think this fine weather is going to last. The glass is very high."

Lady Strode recoiled a little from her son. Her frail hands ached to destroy this invisible but invincible barrier.

"Dear," she said, "I . . . I wish you would tell me." . . .

She said it with a sudden impulse, yet when the words were uttered she trembled with fear.

"Tell you what, mother?" There was more than a hint of impatience in his tone as he looked at her, cool, critical, slightly scornful.

"About yourself," she said desperately; "why you are not happy here . . . what is it that you are fretting about!"

He opened his lips as if to answer, then closed them. In the darkness he could have brought himself, perhaps, to tell her. But between them, ever dividing them, he felt the presence of his father, who had all her confidence and insisted upon having it. A fierce, indomitable figure whom she feared. She would never have kept a secret from him. Better to go on like this than

arouse that slumbering fury. Peace at any price . . . even at this price.

"Dear mother, what strange fancies you have!" he said, and his cold voice flicked her like a lash. "It isn't quite the moment, is it, for the betrayal of any exuberant joy?"

He was glad that she turned away then, and left him. She was his mother, but she was also his father's wife, dutiful, submissive, withholding no secrets. It seemed difficult for a woman to fulfil the delicate and conflicting rôles of wife and mother. The part which women played in the lives of men was a complicated one. They needed all the cunning of wild, swift, hunted things to escape laceration and destruction. He felt sharp pity for his mother, and then a compassion even more deep and intense for Yolande. They were the two women who theoretically should have been nearest to him, whose love should have been able to melt him, and surround him with an exquisite peace. And they had in a sense both sacrificed him. One to her husband; the other to her son. . . .

He was no longer standing in the library at Merrywood, looking at the Sussex skies with the stars shining above the dark boughs of those wind-tossed elms. He was treading the white road that led down to the harbor at San Giuliano, with the dark, moving sea in front of him, and above his head the violet night-sky of the South, . . . pierced with those same stars that watched him now through the old elms of Merrywood Place.

"Dear . . . my dear" . . . he whispered softly.
. . .

Not long afterwards he became painfully aware of the existence of Cat Purflete. When he came into the library to tea one afternoon, he found her sitting there with his mother who, since Rex's death, had received no guests. It aroused Gifford's suspicions a little; he remembered that she had once been considered a suitable girl for Rex to marry.

Lady Kathleen surveyed him. Very good-looking, she decided—perhaps more so than he had ever been, and almost as disagreeable-looking now as Rex. Only, while the one had been smiling and ironic the other was gloomy and morose of aspect. Three or four years ago she had been very much in love with him, although he had hardly ever spoken to her; it was a young girl's fancy, and the hint of wildness had proved an additional and mysterious attraction.

"Do you hate England as much as ever?" she asked, as he offered her some cake.

"I don't remember ever saying that I hated it."

"You've kept pretty clear of it, haven't you?" she said and laughed. But her voice had a nice wholesome sympathetic ring, and it won a smile from him.

"I like traveling, if you mean that," he said.

"Oh, do you?" she said. "I simply hate the sea, and the train, too, if it comes to that. And I hate going to countries where I can't understand a word of what people are saying!"

He thought of Yolande, with her soft, perfect French, her pretty, careful Italian, above

all that touch of foreign accent when she spoke English which seemed to him so wholly adorable.

"I haven't the gift of tongues, you see," she said.

"No? Of course, it is a gift," he admitted absently.

"And then everything's so much nicer in England!"

"Is it?"

"But don't you think so yourself? Does any one like those musty churches with the weird frescoes, and those endless picture galleries? And the dreadful, tawdry images of madonnas and saints!"

(Yes, and Yolande kneeling there, devout, recollected; her head bowed amid the shadows. . . . Yolande on the cliff with the sun upon her hair, praying to the Crucified that he, Gifford, might love her. . . .)

"I'm shocking you, I suppose. But I am very British." . . .

He smiled at her. "But isn't that a good thing to be?"

"I don't even care for that cosmopolitan set in London. Those women who rush over to Paris to buy a veil!"

"Don't you?" said Gifford, still absently.

"Shall you hunt this winter, Mr. Lumleigh?" She thought it wise to change the subject.

"I suppose so."

"And do you hate that, too?"

"I admit I am not passionately fond of it. But I hunt and shoot like every one else."

"I simply love hunting," she said. Her eyes shone.

But she could not win him from that absent, cold mood. His dreams were too far off—too beautiful . . . he was with Yolande, with Ambrose—that pale, thin, sallow baby with the black, mournful eyes. . . .

He learned bitterly the meaning of nostalgia. Lady Strode was tender and patient. She saw that if Cat had made any impression it was hardly a favorable one. Mrs. Sydney Lumleigh was invited to come for a few weeks with Robin, more for her husband's sake than for Gifford's. It was believed that Robin would cheer Lord Strode from his present mood of somber melancholy. Robin was nearly two years old, swift and active for his age, a lovely child of the real Anglo-Saxon type. Masses of fair, flaxen hair curling like an aureole above his brow; blue eyes and rosy cheeks. His chatter got a little on Gifford's nerves. Mrs. Sydney Lumleigh bored him with her delicate invalid ways. And now they wanted him to marry Cat. . . . He longed more than ever to break his bonds . . . to leave all . . . for Yolande. . . . The sight of Robin made his heart ache afresh. He was losing the precious infancy of his own son.

He had not written—not a single line. But he pictured Yolande waiting for him in the olive-woods of San Giuliano . . . he could see her standing on the white road that led to Porto Fino. . . .

"Dear . . . my dear." . . .

What was it all worth apart from her? . . . And behind it all there was the nervous fear that any day Lord Strode might become more insistent upon the subject of marriage. He had dreaded that this might happen the day after Lady Kathleen's visit.

"She is a very charming girl. I hoped once that Rex" . . . said Lord Strode.

"I don't like those big, strong women who laugh so loud!" he said irritably.

Lord Strode said nothing, but his face assumed a perplexed and rather pained expression. Gifford had never been one who could be driven. And he had been extraordinarily reasonable and calm of late, applying himself with diligence to all Mr. Hurrell's instructions. He was perhaps more brilliant than Rex, and he had traveled more and seen more, and had a wider view of things. He would bring a more modern outlook to bear upon his affairs, and Lord Strode began to feel that when Gifford's time to succeed came he would prove a wise and prudent steward. He was eager to recognize good qualities in his surviving son. Both his parents watched Gifford now with a proud and anxious solicitude. If he would only go on as he had begun and set the seal upon his reformation by an early and wise marriage! . . . So the weeks passed smoothly and uneventfully. Gifford saw with poignant insight the trend of their hopes, fears, and wishes. He longed to please them—to live up to the standard so tacitly set before him. But for the moment he simply let things drift. He tried to put Yolande from his thoughts; he tried

to forget the baby who had awakened in him such a passionate emotion of paternal love. Above all, he desired to confess the whole matter to his parents and entreat their forgiveness. But he knew that this was impossible unless he could first break down the religious obduracy of Yolande.

CHAPTER XXIII

GIFFORD was just beginning to settle down, and quiet his conscience and put the thought of Yolande and Ambrose from his mind, when he received one morning a letter with the Italian stamp upon it. The handwriting was strange to him, but the postmark of San Giuliano left little room for doubt that it had been written by one of the inmates of the Villa Viola.

On opening it he turned at once to the signature, and read the name written in large sprawling characters: Maxim Pascoe. He took it up to his own room and read it alone, while an expression of extreme annoyance clouded his face. What was the man writing to him for? Why could he not leave him alone? Christmas was fast approaching; his hands were full; there were innumerable calls upon his time. It was a most inappropriate moment to approach him! . . .

The letter ran as follows:

“DEAR MR. LUMLEIGH (Major Pascoe had never departed from this most formal mode of address in speaking to him),—I am writing to tell you that Yolande has been very ill with a sharp attack of diphtheria; she is still extremely weak, and Ambrose is now laid up with it, and we are all very anxious about him. He is not strong, as you know, and the doctor has a grave doubt

as to whether the poor little boy will pull through. I have not, however, told Yolande this, lest the anxiety should retard her own recovery. Under any other circumstances I should not have written to you, as I am at a loss to conjecture the reasons for your long and extraordinary silence. But I believe that your continued absence, combined with your altogether inexplicable silence, is a source of great anxiety to my daughter; and, therefore, very much against my will I am writing to ask you to come here as soon as you can. Perhaps you will be able also to arrive at some definite conclusion with regard to the future, and thus set her mind at rest.

“Yours truly,

“MAXIM PASCOE.”

Although it was so short the letter made his face burn. He could read between the lines, and he knew quite well what Major Pascoe must think of him. Living as he was doing in the quite novel atmosphere of his father's approbation and affectionate solicitude, he had begun to believe himself the fine and upright character that Lord Strode was learning to regard him. Yet this man—this damaged, dissipated creature, with a reputation that left much to be desired, despite his present suggestion of temporary reformation—most obviously held him to be mean, despicable, worthless. His continued absence . . . his inexplicable silence. . . . Yes—that was how it struck the little group of people at the Villa Viola. “You were only the man she had trusted and who had brought her so low,”—

he could recall Major Pascoe's words flung at him with fierce violence during their first interview at San Giuliano. And just as Yolande was learning to trust him again, to admit the possibility of placing her future life and that of her little son in his hands, to forgive him for all that bygone deception, that past humiliation, he had turned away as from an insupportably difficult situation, and had deliberately set her aside. Yes, he had done this deliberately, had crystallized the position by months of absence and silence because it fitted in best with his present scheme of life. He loved her, but new things charmed this hard and worldly and self-seeking man, who had become Lord Strode's heir.

He put down the letter. Yet . . . when all was said and done, how delicate was Yolande's treatment of him! . . . She had been very ill—perhaps even worse than her father had said—and diphtheria was in its mildest form a painful and dangerous malady. He had had no intimation of her illness until she had partially recovered, until, indeed, his son had fallen a prey to the malady. There had been no playing upon the sentimental side of him. Instead, he had been suffered to remain in happy ignorance of it. This delicacy, this restraint, this cold and unintimate attitude towards him, were things Gifford was able to appreciate. He was fastidious, and he had always been piqued by Yolande's silence, her elusiveness. It was only in those bridal days that he had known anything of the passionate and devoted and beautiful tenderness of which she was capable. Neither be-

fore their marriage nor since her abrupt flight had she ever shown that side of herself to him. During his visit to Italy he had felt as if she had placed a thin screen of ice between herself and him. And he had broken his heart over her coldness; he could pity himself even now in retrospect with a sentimental compassion when he remembered those last days. He had wanted her then—heart and soul and body had alike cried out for her whom he still believed to be his wife. But the two eventful months of separation had seen the birth of a new Gifford—a hard, capable, self-seeking, and ambitious man, who still loved her, but was not prepared to surrender to the conditions she wished to impose. The wand of gold had touched and transformed him. And, to this new Gifford, Yolande and Ambrose were encumbrances in the way of success, obstacles in the path. If Yolande still insisted upon the condition that Ambrose should be brought up as a Catholic, he saw no course open to him but to annul the marriage, and, if possible, owing to its irregularity, to establish the illegitimacy of Ambrose. Then he would marry—for the sake of his house and name—an English girl of good family. Not Cat—for he demanded charm and beauty as well as birth. But there must be no damaged and disreputable father in the field of vision, hovering like some ill-omened bird of prey in the background! . . .

Still, the letter was there, and it had to be answered. Major Pascoe was something of an unknown quantity to Gifford; he appeared to have undergone a considerable change since his

daughter's history had taken such a tragic turn. And hitherto he had been commendably silent. This letter was his first definite action. He had never sought to communicate with him before. Gifford felt a little alarmed. The man had turned over a new leaf since the Boulogne days, and Yolande and her baby were now his chief interests in life. He was quite devoted to them, and had given up all his own pleasures to live a life of solitude and seclusion with them at the Villa Viola. There was no doubt that, if necessary, he was prepared to fight his daughter's battles for her. He might even contemplate the desirability of obtaining a dissolution of the English marriage, which under the circumstances could hardly be difficult of achievement. This would mean for Gifford what he most feared—the publication of this fresh matrimonial entanglement, and the inevitable disclosure to his parents of recent perfidy and deception. He might any day be driven into a corner, and compelled to make a clean breast of this delinquency, annulling all the good opinions which he had sought to win from them of late at such great cost, and destroying those suave, agreeable and even affectionate relations which at present existed between him and his father.

It was quite possible that letters less cold, less temperately worded, and altogether less amicable, might succeed to the one which now lay before him. He thought that he might learn to dread the arrival of his daily letters. Annoyed and perplexed, he wrote several rough drafts of a reply. But none pleased him. It was, however,

absolutely necessary to temporize until he had sought the advice of Mr. Hurrell. Perhaps it would be simpler to confide in the lawyer, putting the whole matter plainly before him. Hurrell was a broad-minded man of the world, so accustomed to human peccadilloes that he had long ago ceased to be shocked at any exhibition of human baseness, meanness, or depravity. If there was a way out of the imbroglio—a safe and silent way—without doubt Hurrell would put a dry legal finger upon it. But in the meantime it was hardly feasible to leave home and go to town to consult him, and as the head of the firm he would probably be absent for his Christmas holiday. And there were many things connected with the season which had to be attended to at Merrywood. Everything was to be subdued and quiet owing to the recent death of Reginald, but certain customs were as unalterable as the proverbial laws of the Medes and Persians. And Gifford had undertaken to see to such matters, directing agent and secretary, and communicating to them his father's wishes. So the interview must be postponed, for it now only wanted a week till Christmas, and in the meantime Major Pascoe's letter seemed to demand a conciliatory reply. Gifford finally decided upon adopting a lofty tone and the letter which was finally written and posted by himself a day or two later at the nearest large town, ran as follows:

“DEAR MAJOR PASCOE,—I am indeed distressed to hear that both Yolande and Ambrose have been suffering from diphtheria, but I trust

they are now on the high road to convalescence. I am afraid I am unable to give you any other reason for my long silence than the plea of very pressing business affairs, which since the death of my elder brother have practically taken up all my time and attention. Much of the business of the estate has since his death devolved upon me. It has, therefore, been impossible for me to attend to my own affairs, or to leave Merrywood and my parents, who now have no other son to look to. But I will try and arrange to come out and have a definite talk with you later on. I must add that both my father and mother are quite ignorant of my *soi-disant* second marriage, and it is highly necessary that I should not add to their present bitter sorrow by intruding such an unwelcome fact upon them. I do not know if there is any prospect of Yolande's changing her very obdurate views upon the question of religion. If this were done all might yet be arranged on a smooth and happy basis. My altered situation has shown me the necessity for not taking any rash or imprudent steps. Yolande's past disinclination to make any compromise on the religious question must be regarded as one of the chief causes of my silence and absence.

"Believe me,

"Yours truly,

"GIFFORD LUMLEIGH."

Happily, or perhaps unhappily (since the instruction thus acquired might possibly prove of infinite service in the matter of future communications), we cannot follow our letters to their des-

tinations and witness the effect of them upon their recipients. Yet Gifford could have been in little doubt as to the effect of his missive upon a delicate woman who was only just recovering from a dangerous illness. Not that he had intended deliberately to hurt her, although he knew the letter must come like a fresh wound; but he had resolved to give her a definite inkling as to the change which was coming over his attitude towards her. It was not the moment, he assured himself, to think of her feelings, and he hoped that he had not been too brutal; but it was undoubtedly the moment to deal firmly and decisively with Major Pascoe, and to show him that, far from being willing to accept her conditions, he was definitely disposed to combat them.

"Is there any letter, papa?"

Yolande came out into the loggia with Ambrose in her arms. The loggia faced south, and was warm with the golden sunshine. Christmas Day had dawned unusually fair and bright.

Ambrose was almost hidden from view, so closely was he wrapped up, for he was only just getting over his attack, and was still very weak. He cried and fretted from time to time. The illness had pulled him down, and he was an emaciated little skeleton, with all the soft and rosy curves of his little body shrunken to yellow skin and bone. His dark eyes looked enormous, sunken and wistful, and rather pathetic, as if suffering had puzzled his baby intelligence. Yolande had been up night and day with him ever since her own convalescence. When he slept she spent the time praying passionately for his re-

covery. She had had a trained nurse sent from Genoa—a nun, who devoted herself to the child—and Miss Tibbit was also unceasing in her care. But Yolande could not be brought to relinquish Ambrose entirely into their keeping. In spite of her own acute weakness she resisted the entreaties of the doctor and of her father that she should spare herself. She looked now very ill, and something of the fresh youth had gone from her face.

Major Pascoe flung Gifford's letter on the table and smoked in silence for some moments. He knew that he could not keep its contents from her. Yolande was a person to whom frank treatment was the only possible one. She could bare her breast for a blow and receive it without a sound, but agonizing suspense wore her to a shadow.

"You've got to know, I suppose," he grunted. "I'd have saved you if I could." He watched her anxiously as she sat there, still with Ambrose pressed to her heart, reading Gifford's letter. He saw with anguish how the last two months had changed her.

When she put it down her face was still calm, though its pallor was almost deathly now; she seemed to clasp Ambrose a little more closely.

"You think, then, he doesn't mean to come at all?" she said pitifully.

The Major nodded.

"If it weren't for the boy I should forbid him to come near you again!" he said almost fiercely.

"But I don't want him to come, papa—if he is unwilling. And I can see from this letter that

he doesn't care any more—not, at least, as he used to care. He doesn't want us. He has other things to think of." She looked out seawards with large wistful eyes. How dear he had been—this man who had used her so ill! For the sake of his love she had forgiven him much. And now that love was dead—or at least dying. His "altered situation" set a seal on that youthful folly. Their ways lay far apart. And she and her boy were to be set aside.

There were two people in Gifford, and she had known and loved dearly that better self which was so seldom in the ascendant. She could never have learned to condemn him altogether.

Ambrose woke and cried. She rocked him in her arms, kissing his dark rings of hair, murmuring words of tenderness. He was all that remained to her of that beautiful love-dream.

"You mustn't pity me too much, papa," she said, with a wan smile that hurt him; "I've got Ambrose. Is it wicked of me to think he was worth it all?" She put her thin cheek against the baby's. "And I've got you and Tibby. I'm surrounded with so much love that I ought not to complain!"

"Anyhow, Ambrose need never know what an unmitigated scoundrel his father is!" said Maxim Pascoe.

"Oh, you mustn't abuse him," she said softly with shining eyes. "He has so much good in him. Only he has never had a chance."

"You can do nothing with a man who isn't straight," said Major Pascoe. "I've a very good mind to write to his father."

"Oh, you mustn't do that," she said. "For my sake you mustn't do that. If he can't love me I don't want him to learn to hate me. I'd rather be a pleasant memory to him. And you must remember that I do love him still." She made this admission with an almost childlike frankness. "I don't want to make it impossible for him to come back if he ever wishes to. If we write bitter unforgivable things now it would prevent any reconciliation in the future. And he must not displease his father when he is in such great grief. We must be patient. And whenever he does come . . . he will be welcome." . . .

The Major groaned.

"Oh, you're a nice pair! Where's your pride, little girl?"

"Haven't you seen it?" she said, hurt and bewildered. "I laid down my conditions plainly enough . . . and he can't accept them."

"I beg your pardon, my dear," he said; "I spoke too hastily. No one could have behaved more beautifully and wisely in a very difficult position. But I hate to think you can keep a place in your heart for him still, after the way he has behaved." . . .

She rose and came and stood by his side.

"You see, I once believed that I was his wife—for a whole beautiful month. . . . I loved him then as my husband. Can one ever forget that?"

"Oh, my darling child—I suppose one can't!" he cried, thinking of those few short months he had spent with his own beloved.

She bent down and kissed his head.

"Oh, if I had only told you—consulted you,"

she said. "I'm not blameless, papa—how can I blame Gifford? He was young too." . . .

"And it has never entered your head to make any compromise?" he suggested diffidently.

"Compromise?" She knitted her delicate brows.

"About Ambrose . . . and the religion?"

"Oh, no," she said. "That is quite impossible. Not for any heritage in the world. I'm not—" she smiled, though now there were tears in her eyes—"I'm not going to do less for my boy than you did for me." . . .

He knew that was her final irrevocable answer. Veronica's dead hands were holding her fast. Yes—he had seen to it that she had the faith . . . and this was the result. She was going to let it ruin all her worldly prospects, all Ambrose's worldly prospects . . . and he could not blame her . . . he even felt proud of her as she stood there making that brave answer to his timidly put question.

She kept a brave face, but when she went upstairs and put Ambrose back in his cradle she broke down completely, and sobbed in desolate fashion. It seemed as if that letter, cruel, cold, almost insulting, had extinguished the light of all the world, plunging it in irremediable gloom, hiding the glory of sun and stars. . . .

He would never come back now. His love was dead. Her pain was at first almost physical—as if a cold and wounding hand had clutched her heart. She was abandoned and deserted. And in her agony it seemed to her that she had never loved Gifford so passionately as she did then—

that never had he been so enduringly dear to her. That, too, was part of her punishment.

Tibby said little to Major Pascoe, and nothing to Yolande. She read the letter, and told Maxim it was what she had always expected. Gifford, as Lord Strode's heir, was not coming back to claim a wife and son who represented such disabilities, nor had he any intention of introducing them at Merrywood Place. She shrugged her shoulders. She recognized the new Gifford, and she hated him, if possible, more than the old one.

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. HURRELL occupied the second floor of a grim and narrow house built of brown brick, in a street that ran from the Strand to the Embankment, which was a favorite one with men of his profession. His own sanctum was a front room, in the middle of which there stood an immense table. It was, however, none too large for the multiplicity of letters, papers, and other things which habitually rested upon it. Mr. Hurrell invariably sat at this table on the side farthest from the door, so that he faced all those who entered, and it might even have been supposed that this formidable piece of furniture acted also as an entrenchment between his person and the possibility of attack. A telephone stood close to his left hand; a writing-pad and inkstand occupied the place of honor in front of him. Papers in dusty accumulation were heaped upon other tables, and shelves. Deed-boxes stood one above the other in black and gloomy columns on the floor, climbing up towards the murky soot-engrined ceiling. In white letters on the black japanned sides could be read such inscriptions as these: "Executors of the late John Smith, Esq.," "Executors of the late Earl of Bettington," "Executors of the late Lady Priscilla Constance Leamington," and so forth.

January hung a bleak pall of yellow fog over London. Fog-horns sounded with melancholy monotony and shrill persistency from the river that flowed silently a few hundreds of yards away. The more ear-piercing shrieks of trains also frequently reached Mr. Hurrell's ears. A steady stream of traffic flowed all day down the street—the clatter of hoofs, the grinding of wheels, the thundering past of great drays. Mr. Hurrell disliked noise; his nerves were not as good as they used to be. But his heart was triply encased in iron. Emotions had ceased to sway him. He had exploited all forms of human baseness; there were few dark labyrinths of the human mind with which he was not intimately acquainted, and he felt that he had at least earned the right to be cynical. He was accustomed to that terrific and awe-compelling sight—the human heart laid bare with all its guile, all its amazing perfidy.

The door—which bore on a brass plate the simple legend, *Messrs. Hurrell, Hurrell and Mortimer*—was opened as he sat there, on that inclement morning of January, to admit the son of a very old and esteemed client—Mr. Gifford Lumleigh. It had now closed again, and Gifford came in and shook hands with Mr. Hurrell, who had risen to receive him.

Mr. Hurrell had held the affairs of Merrywood in his hands ever since he had taken his father's place as head of the firm. His father had acted for the first Lord Strode, and had drawn up that famous will which was now so profoundly agitating the mind of Gifford, and he had been the

highly-trusted and valued friend of that nobleman who had risen to political prominence in the early days of Queen Victoria's reign. Mr. Hurrell was himself intimately acquainted with all the business affairs of the Strode family, but he had not much first-hand knowledge of Gifford. It is true that he had acted for him in the case of *Lumleigh v. Lumleigh* and Harrison, which some five years ago had been undefended in the Divorce Court. An unfortunate affair that, but happily there had been no children of that disastrous marriage, and the lady was now dead. Neither she nor Mr. Harrison had put in any defense, and he had heard they were married directly the decree was made absolute. Mr. Hurrell had, however, done a good deal to pacify Lord Strode's wrath on that occasion, and had persuaded him not to alter his will and leave Gifford's name out of it altogether, as he had threatened to do. He had pleaded youth—wild oats—boys will be boys—all the recognized formulæ in defense of Gifford. He even helped to effect a formal reconciliation between father and son—a measure strongly opposed by Rex, who had previously supported Lord Strode in his desire to forbid his younger son to enter the house.

Mr. Hurrell wondered why Gifford had come to see him so secretly to-day. His letter had said that he desired to consult him upon a very urgent matter, and that he wished no one to know of his visit. It was impossible to suppose that he could have plunged into fresh matrimonial indiscretions. He had burnt his fingers pretty

badly over that first affair. He must surely have learned a salutary lesson then.

The lawyer had a winning, professional smile, calculated to put the most embarrassed client at his ease.

"Good morning, Mr. Lumleigh. I hope you left your father pretty well? It was distressing to see him so overwhelmed with grief. A very sad affair—such a bright, promising young life!"

"Oh, he seems to be getting over it all right," said Gifford, nervously glancing round the room as if to assure himself that there was no one else present. "Executors of the late Honorable Reginald Lumleigh" confronted him in sharp white letters from one of those black japanned boxes. Reginald had left everything dutifully to his father, and he and Mr. Hurrell had been the executors of the will. His large private fortune in default of direct heirs descended automatically to Gifford; he had no control over it, or most certainly his brother would have enjoyed no part of it.

"You must find a great change in your own circumstances, Mr. Lumleigh. A very pleasant change, I may say—had it not been for the lamentable event which led up to it." He gazed sympathetically at Gifford, as if to assure him of his ability to see both sides of the medal. "Wealth is a great power . . . and to be young and rich!" . . .

"I don't think it is powerful enough to help me in my present muddle, Mr. Hurrell. But before I tell you a single word you must make me a very solemn promise that during my lifetime,

at any rate, you will never reveal to any one what I'm going to tell you now. My father and mother are in complete ignorance, and they must remain so. If you cannot make this promise it will be useless for me to proceed!" His face hardened. He was growing, Mr. Hurrell thought, wonderfully like the Strodes. A difficult family . . . with excellent points.

"Well, of course, if you insist, Mr. Lumleigh. And in the event of your death?"

"You could use your own discretion, but I think, under those circumstances, you would be almost obliged to speak," said Gifford. "However, you can consider that point later. I want legal advice and legal help. I've got myself into a confounded mess!"

"Dear, dear!" purred Mr. Hurrell, with a concerned but at the same time soothing air. "How very unfortunate! Let us hope it isn't so bad as you suppose. People, we find, are apt to exaggerate their difficulties, and we lawyers can often do a great deal to minimize them." . . .

His curiosity was now quite definitely aroused, but he concealed it admirably.

"I am accustomed," he went on suavely, "to dealing with very difficult and complicated and delicate matters—matrimonial and financial and even—" he paused and cleared his throat—"and even criminal. . . . It is part of our work. And I can promise the most inviolate secrecy, Mr. Lumleigh."

"Very well," said Gifford, coming to the point without delay; "I went to Boulogne in the summer of the year before last—and I met a girl

there. I fell in love with her and asked her to marry me. I induced her to keep the whole affair a secret from her father. But she came over to England in July of the same year, and we were married by special licence in a London church. She wasn't of age—she was only eighteen. We didn't tell any one. We lived together in Devonshire, and afterwards at Brighton. While we were in Brighton we met Mrs. Harrison quite by chance. I had not, of course, told my wife anything about her. For one thing, you see, she is a Roman Catholic." . . .

At this ominous statement Mr. Hurrell pricked up his ears, and listened with increasing attention.

"I need not tell you," continued Gifford, "that Catholics do not recognize divorce, and, as a Catholic, her marriage with a man, who had a divorced wife living, wasn't a marriage at all. When she found out about my former wife and the divorce she left me at once—that very day—and went back to her father. I lost sight of her, although after Mrs. Harrison's death I made every effort to find her. And I did find her—last September, a few weeks before Rex's death. She was living at San Giuliano, a little village not far from Porto Fino. In the interval she had borne a child—a son. She still denied that she was my wife, though she expressed her willingness to marry me if I would consent to her continuing to bring up the child in the Catholic faith. He had been baptized by the priest. But she refused to marry me under any other conditions."

"Dear, dear! how very unfortunate!" purred

Mr. Hurrell, whose shrewd mind had at once grasped every possibility of this tangled maze.

"Well, I want to know if I'm married or not! I want to know if Ambrose is my legitimate heir. You're a lawyer—you ought to know these things!"

"Oh, I couldn't give you an answer straight off without knowing a great many more details. Her being under age—the absence of any domicile in England . . . the marriage being in her eyes invalid—all these things might make it easy for you to procure an annulment of the marriage." . . .

"But annulling it won't affect the boy," said Gifford; "and she won't give him up. As a Catholic, he cannot, of course, succeed to the property. The only thing, as far as I can see, is to establish the invalidity of the marriage and the consequent illegitimacy of the child. Or," and now his gray eyes were fastened upon Mr. Hurrell with a very strange and almost fierce expression, as of a man about to do something deliberately cruel, "or to take Ambrose away from her and bring him up as I choose!"

"Now let us take the question of annulling the marriage," said the lawyer. "Would she be likely to oppose such proceedings?"

"Not she. She's only mad to have the boy!"

"And you mean to tell me that you have offered to legalize the tie from her point of view, and that she has refused on account of the religious question?" said Mr. Hurrell in a slightly amazed tone.

"That's what it comes to practically. I was

mad to marry her under any conditions. I was just going to write the letter and agree to her terms—for I was a fool about her, Mr. Hurrell—when the telegram came from my father announcing Rex's death."

"Most providential," murmured Mr. Hurrell. "And I take it his lordship is unaware of the existence of this lady?"

"He only knows that I wanted to marry her when I first came home from Boulogne. We had an awful row about it, and I left home. But I never told him that I had married her, nor that she was a Catholic."

"Nothing against her, of course? Perhaps not quite of your own class?" inquired Mr. Hurrell.

"She is the most beautiful and the best woman in the world," said Gifford warmly; "of course, she is a lady. Her father is not well off, a retired officer—a bit of a gambler, and too fond of absinthe, between ourselves. But there is nothing against her—nothing to prevent her from taking her place at Merrywood as my wife—the loveliest woman who has ever set foot within its doors!"

"A clandestine marriage and a ready-made son," murmured Mr. Hurrell, as if he were musing aloud; "it would certainly be a bit of a shock for his lordship if it came to his ears! And then the religion! A very unfortunate affair, Mr. Lumleigh. But never fear—we'll steer you through all right. No danger of any action on her part, I presume?"

"Oh, not from her certainly. But I don't know much about the father, and I don't like

what I've seen of him. Rather a disagreeable and disreputable-looking person."

"But you haven't made one thing quite clear to me," said Mr. Hurrell. "Do you want to get rid of her and the boy?"

Gifford was silent for a moment, and his eyes were fixed on the floor. At last he said with an effort:

"If it hadn't been for Rex's death I intended to marry her on her own conditions, and let her bring up the boy, and any other children we might have had, just as she pleased. But now I don't see my way to do this. I only want, if possible, to claim the boy and to take him away from her—if he proves to be legitimate. And if not, I can of course think about marrying. My father is naturally very anxious for me to marry. He hasn't begun to put on any pressure so far, but he's hinted at it more than once."

"But you made promises when you married her? You were married, I suppose, in a Catholic church?"

"Yes—I signed a paper. But I told the priest a lie. I told him I was unmarried, and said I was the son of John Lumleigh, without mentioning my father's title. Now do you think I've got a right to my son?"

"A legal right certainly, should the marriage prove to be entirely in order. But it is a very nice point of law. . . . This lady evidently holds very strong views on the subject of religion, and might possibly fight for the possession of her boy."

"Oh, yes—she would do that," said Gifford;

"it might even have to be done secretly. But if he is my son, I mean to have him, Mr. Hurrell!"

He set his square Strode jaw. Then he rose to his feet.

"You must find a way out of the *impasse*, Mr. Hurrell," he said. "I am in my father's good books at present, and I don't want to do anything to disturb the peace again. I've let the matter slide already for nearly three months. And I've had one pretty disagreeable letter from her father."

"But I think I can tell you one thing," said Mr. Hurrell, "and that is, if there is no actual flaw in the marriage—which I very much doubt—you are married, and this child is your son and heir. I should say you have come to me too late, Mr. Lumleigh. You can't get rid of your wife without a good deal of publicity. And we should, in any case, have a great deal of trouble in obtaining possession of your son. It is a very unusual case, and I hope you will forgive my saying it is a singularly unpleasant one. There are penalties attached to the making of such false representations as you seem to have made. It might militate very seriously against your eventually making such a marriage as would satisfy his lordship's very natural ambition, especially as this son, if he lives, must succeed to the title. Our English marriage laws have come into collision with Rome on more than one occasion, and never with very satisfactory results to us. Rome stands in the way of all progress, and influences the other churches more strongly than they would ever admit, and I wish the whole

world could see it in the same light as we see it. The wonder is that so many people can be found to submit to a jurisdiction that interferes not only with their civil rights, but with their natural claim to happiness!"

"Oh, I'm not afraid of the Vatican," said Gifford; "it is quite a back number. Who ever reads its Encyclicals, I should like to know? It can't keep me from my son—if he is my legitimate son!"

"That is a singularly unprincipled young man," thought Mr. Hurrell, when the door had at last closed upon Gifford Lumleigh, "and I sincerely pity the girl, whoever she is. Still, we cannot have the Vatican telling an Englishman what religion his son is to be brought up in, or saying a legal marriage isn't a marriage at all. It is interfering with the liberty of the subject—a very sacred thing, and one about which an Englishman may be permitted to feel very strongly! But I'm afraid he thoroughly deceived her and the priest too, in representing himself to be an unmarried man. That won't look very nice for Lord Strode's son when it gets into the papers."

CHAPTER XXV

AFTER his interview with Mr. Hurrell Gifford did not immediately return to Merrywood, as had been his original intention. Instead, he left town by the night express on his way to Genoa.

This was a sudden decision. He felt that it was absolutely necessary to see Yolande again and make a final endeavor to bring her to reason. In his heart he still hoped that she would yield, and that their marriage might take place. He was angry with her on account of her obstinacy, but he loved her still, and the wish to see her again was very strong.

If only things could be amicably arranged on a basis agreeable to his own family, there seemed yet every prospect of happiness for himself and Yolande. But he had very little hope of combating that innate religious obstinacy of hers. It was a thing too deeply engrafted in her mind. It had been strong enough to make her separate herself from him when apparently their happiness was at its height. It was strong because it was also hereditary. And it perplexed him the more because she was not—to outward appearance—at all *dévoté*.

Mr. Hurrell had proved slightly less sympathetic than he had expected. Evidently he had

regarded him as something of a fool, for having after one sharp experience repeated an insensate blunder, and possibly as something of a knave for wishing to repudiate the woman who failed to fit in to his present position.

He had not written as yet to prepare Yolande for his coming. He would wire from Genoa. He thought she would not refuse to see him when he had arrived in Italy and was so near. But on reaching Genoa late on the evening of a cold January day he went to an hotel near the station, and postponed telegraphing until the next morning. He was tired after his journey, and the long night in the train which seemed to have shaken and jolted him more than usual.

After all, where was the use of telling her beforehand? He would go out to San Giuliano by the first train he could catch, and take his chance. No further communication had passed between them, and his letter to Major Pascoe had remained unanswered.

The weather was very bad. A strong wind was blowing from the sea, cold and fierce squalls of rain swept through the streets, and Gifford shivered as he walked across to the station. It was only a degree less cold and gloomy than the London he had left. Gifford, who was sensitive to weather and disliked the cold intensely, felt that the stormy skies and bleak angry rain were unpropitious auguries for the success of his present expedition.

It was still raining when he descended from the train at San Giuliano, and took a carriage up to the villa. He passed the harbor where a num-

ber of fishing-boats had taken refuge from last night's storm; then he came in sight of the little white town, lying amid its nest of gray olive-trees, above which the slender campanile of the church was thrust against a background of green hill and leafless woods. The great promontory of Porto Fino was almost blotted from view by the dense masses of cloud that swept over it. The storm showed no sign of abating when the carriage stopped before the high iron gates of the Villa Viola.

There was no one in the loggia, and when he rang the bell it seemed to clang mournfully as if the house were empty. It was almost a relief to see the door open and Miss Tibbit's form standing there, its stout outline in bold relief against the white-washed wall of the vestibule.

"Is . . . is Yolande in?" he said. The presence of Miss Tibbit made him feel nervous. He felt that she did not wish to admit him.

"Yes—she's in," said Susan Tibbit, and now the prim governess was severely in the ascendant. Many of her old pupils would have quailed before the look she now bestowed upon Gifford Lumleigh, knowing that it was the harbinger of condign punishment. "I don't know if you can see her. She has been ill, and she is still very anxious about the baby."

"May I see Major Pascoe, then?" he said almost humbly.

The rain was still beating rather heavily upon him; his teeth chattered, but short of pushing past her he could not enter the house she was guarding.

"If you wait inside I'll go and ask him," she said.

He was still standing there on the mat, not venturing to come a step farther. She pointed to a chair. "Won't you sit down?"

Gifford sat there waiting. Above, he could hear a faint cry stealing through the house—the wail of a very weak baby. The sound stirred him. He longed to rush upstairs to the nursery, and hold his son in his arms, and kiss Yolande. How much longer was Miss Tibbit going to keep him waiting there in this anguish of suspense?

He guessed that she would be in no hurry to return. She was perhaps rejoicing to feel that for once she had her victim securely empaled. He had always been aware of her tacit hostility; she had never been at great pains to hide it from him. While he was thus musing a step sounded in the passage, and Major Pascoe appeared.

"I didn't know we were to have the pleasure of seeing you here to-day, Mr. Lumleigh," he said, with a cold and formal politeness; "it is not the most convenient moment you could have chosen. Ambrose is very ill. He had hardly got over the diphtheria when he had a sharp touch of pleurisy. And well, the fact is—an operation was performed yesterday to relieve the lung . . . and his condition is not at all satisfactory."

The news struck Gifford like a sudden blow.

"I am sorry . . ." he stammered. . . . "I am very sorry. . . . I meant to let you know . . . but it was a sudden idea. It was the first opportunity I had had of leaving home, so I took my

chance. I got to Genoa last night, and came straight on this morning."

"Indeed?" said Major Pascoe. His tone was indescribably chilling. "But I'm afraid you will not be able to see Yolande to-day. She is very tired and upset, poor child. I shall not tell her you are here."

His blue eyes were fixed upon Gifford with a searching look. They seemed to say: "We don't want you—you have no right here with your wife and child." . . . Gifford flinched under it.

"Please let me see her, Major Pascoe. Or, at least, tell her I'm here . . . let her choose if she will see me or not!"

"I'm afraid I can't do that," said Maxim firmly; "I'm sure that it would still further upset her to know that you were here. You should have come a month ago—when I first wrote to you."

"I couldn't come—I thought I'd made that quite clear . . ." said Gifford.

Upstairs he could still hear that faint moaning wail . . . it seemed to pierce his heart. . . .

"I think I must ask you not to come again for a few days. When Ambrose is out of danger I will find out whether Yolande wishes to see you." He spoke in a tone of cold formality.

"Is he in any danger?" said Gifford.

"Yes—he is in considerable danger." Maxim Pascoe consulted his watch. "I am due up there now," he said. "You will be at the hotel for the present, I suppose? I will write to you there."

Rather reluctantly he held out his hand. Gifford felt there was no course open to him but to go away. Yet—how intolerable that this man should have the power and right to keep him from the side of his dying son. He made one more effort.

"You really mean this?" he said. "You mean that I'm to go without seeing Yolande? Without her even knowing that I'm here? I'm to go, when my son is dying?" His voice broke, and there were tears of passion as well as grief on his black lashes.

"Yes—I am afraid I do mean that," said Maxim inexorably. "You have forfeited all right you may ever have had to be with Yolande—to comfort her." . . . He stepped past Gifford and opened the door. A storm of wind and rain swept into the hall, overturning a pot of freesias. It fell to the ground with a little crash.

And with that sound echoing in his ears Gifford passed through the open door of the Villa Viola, and heard the Major close it gently behind him. He hurried down the path, bowing his head to the gale.

Gifford almost broke down under the stress of this new anxiety. His desire to see Yolande became an all-absorbing obsession; he could think of nothing else. All that day he wondered how Ambrose was, whether he was holding his own, how matters were going to end. In spite of the weather he went out for a long walk; to remain in the hotel was impossible. It was almost empty, except for a German couple; there was

nothing to do, nothing to read. And the wind shook the windows violently, shrieking and wailing over land and sea like an unquiet spirit. How different from those lovely golden autumn days he had spent there only a few short months ago. Then his happiness had been within reach—what a fool he had been not to pluck the fruit that was ready to his hand! To go home—to make a clean breast of it—to face the music—how much easier that would have been than this compulsory exile from Yolande's beloved presence. He had come here on purpose to offer her terms which he knew beforehand that she would not accept; he had come prepared to put an end to all things between them unless she would give way to his will; he had intended to torture her with the threat of removing her child from her keeping. When he remembered this his face flamed. He knew, far better than Major Pascoe did, how thoroughly he had deserved all the pain and humiliation to which he had been subjected on arrival at the Villa Viola. Yes—he had forfeited all right to comfort his wife—to be with her in her new and terrible anxiety—and the thought of the torment she was undergoing, not a mile away, still further increased the sense of bitter shame which the Major's words had so pitilessly evoked. He could not sleep that night. He wondered how soon Major Pascoe would write to him. He knew that he would be in no hurry to do so. And he dared not risk a second visit to the villa even to inquire for Ambrose.

The morning was fine; the wind had dropped and the sun was shining. Porto Fino had

emerged from the enveloping masses of cloud, and stood clearly silhouetted against a deep blue sky. Gifford began to feel as if he were really in Italy. The sunshine was invigorating. But he did not go out. All the morning he waited, hoping that some news might reach him. But no letter came. If he had ever tortured Yolande by his own silence, she was being slowly avenged now for all the pain she had endured.

Ambrose had a better night, and even Yolande had a little rest, satisfied that he was at least holding his own. In the morning her father told her of Gifford's visit on the preceding day. She flushed a little, and at first said nothing. But later she came to him and said in a puzzled tone:

"Why do you think he has come now?"

"He didn't say," replied Maxim, "and I didn't ask him."

"Do you think I ought to see him?"

"You must please yourself. I suppose you will have to do so, sooner or later."

She paused, and her delicate dark brows were knitted in a frown.

"I think you had better write and ask him to come; I think I had better see him," she said.

Major Pascoe shrugged his shoulders. Such an interview could only be productive of further pain to her, of that he felt quite sure. It was astonishing that her love for him should still survive. Even the knowledge that he was in San Giuliano had put color into her pale cheeks, and light into her heavy, sleepless eyes. She looked almost like a young girl. Yes, Gifford had still

the power to call back that look of youth and happiness into her face.

Grudgingly he sat down and wrote the letter, asking Gifford to come and dine that night. It was Yolande who persuaded him to this act of hospitality. "And I'm obliged to be away from Ambrose when we are dining, in any case," she added. She spared but a few moments in those days away from her beloved child—only just what were necessary in which to eat, and snatch a little sleep. During the crisis of his illness she had scarcely tasted food, and had never gone to bed.

She was alone in the drawing-room when Gifford came. She rose and came towards him, a frail, changed figure, infinitely sad. The sight of him melted her. She suffered him to take her in his arms; she was very still while he kissed her, murmuring words of tenderness and love. She could forgive him now, and she could love him though she had no longer any illusions about him. And those long hours of waiting, the frustration, even though only temporary, of his desire to see her again had revived his curious, almost episodic, passion for her which had been dying for want of sustenance. How could he say the things he had come to say? She looked so ill, so helpless, so sad, that it would have been wanton cruelty to add in any way to the misery of her lot. As he held her closely he told himself that she was more to him than anything else in the world—that for her sake he would exile himself from Merrywood, and forfeit the new-found esteem of his parents . . . he would do all that she wished,

so that only he might claim her as his wife. "Yolande . . . Yolande . . . my beloved . . ." he said.

"Oh, Gifford—I have wanted you"—Her voice was like music with its pretty touch of foreign accent. "I have been through such a dreadful time with poor little Ambrose. Papa told you perhaps that he had an operation. Poor little baby! But he is better to-day, and the doctor hopes that he is going to pull through."

"Dear heart," he said; "you look as if you hadn't slept for weeks! And you have been ill yourself. What must you think of me?" His remorse was keen; self-reproach was gnawing him.

"Oh, but I understood so well, Gifford," she said earnestly, "I understood—but papa and Tibby do not see things in the same light. Your poor parents were in such grief—of course you could not be selfish and burden them with your own troubles. If papa had been in such grief I should not have said anything to worry him, so you see I understand. And I felt that you would come as soon as you could—with prudence." . . .

How beautiful she was—how good—how unsuspecting.

"Yolande . . . my dearest dear . . . I ought to have come long ago. . . . But I am glad you are not angry." . . . He held her almost fiercely, kissing her. "You do love me still, don't you? For I love you, beloved, more than ever."

"Yes—I love you, Gifford," she said simply. "I have never changed. I think I am too old to

change now. Why, I am a great age—I shall soon be twenty years old!”

“Twenty!” he said; “why, you are only a baby, dear Yolande!”

“Am I?” she said. “I feel very old. Perhaps it is because I have a baby of my own.” . . .

Twenty . . . and therefore too old to change. There was something to him almost humorous in this view of the case—humorous if it had not also been so infinitely pathetic. . . .

They had little time for further conversation, for Major Pascoe and Miss Tibbit joined them soon afterwards. Dinner was a very brief meal, for Yolande could not spare much more time away from Ambrose. At intervals word was brought to her from the nursery, telling her that he was still asleep, had awakened and taken nourishment, and so forth. It was a very solemn little party, and Gifford felt extremely uncomfortable the whole time. While Yolande still believed in him and still loved him, since now she considered herself too old to change—he was perfectly aware that her good opinion was not shared either by Major Pascoe or Tibby. When the meal came to an end Yolande rose.

“I am going up to the nursery,” she said to Gifford half timidly, “would you like to come a moment before you go?”

“Yes, I should like to see him,” he said, and followed her. They went up the narrow flight of stairs, and down the long glazed loggia that led to the nursery. A big wood fire was blazing on the hearth, giving forth an aromatic smoke

which hung haze-like in the room. Ambrose's little cot was drawn up close to the fire. There was a bed near it where Yolande had slept since his illness. A nun was sitting there, watching the child as he lay asleep.

Gifford knelt down beside the crib and gently uncovered the little face. Ambrose was scarcely less changed than his mother. He was thin almost to emaciation; a hard, hectic flush burned in his cheeks; the hand that Gifford touched with such tenderness was fiery hot, with the fever that seemed to be consuming him. The sick child, hovering on the borderland between life and death, lying there unconscious of the anxiety he was stirring in their hearts, seemed to Gifford a thing infinitely precious. A sound like a sob broke from him. Was he to set aside these ties, at once so near and so dear? . . . How could he ever have planned to take Ambrose away from his mother? How could he break these most intimate bonds that held him chained and fettered with love? He rose to his feet, and the face that was turned to Yolande was grave and pale.

"You must pray for him, Gifford . . ." she said. "I . . . couldn't bear to lose him. He is so precious to me." . . .

"And for his sake, Yolande—you must come back to me," he said. "When will you come, beloved?" He looked down into her eyes.

"Whenever you wish," she said; "whenever you feel able to promise . . . the things I have asked you to promise." . . .

He left her, telling himself that nothing should keep them apart any more.

CHAPTER XXVI

DURING the days that followed Gifford spent long hours in the room of his little sick son. Indeed, he took his place there so simply that it seemed to Yolande almost natural that he should be there, sharing her anxiety and helping her in this silent intimate way. It seemed to bring them nearer together, and she was able to feel that sense of tranquil happiness which his mere presence had been able to give her in the old days.

It was hardly the time to discuss plans for the future, but the fact of his remaining at the Villa Viola seemed to be proof of his intention to accept the terms and conditions offered by Yolande, and even Major Pascoe assumed a slightly more friendly attitude towards him. Without him Yolande would certainly never be happy; she had fretted herself to a shadow all these months of his absence; it was useless to put any further obstacles in the way. The marriage would be a disastrous one for Gifford, and he would certainly have to face a complete rupture with his parents. But apparently he loved Yolande sufficiently to make the sacrifice.

In reality Gifford was very far from happy, very far from feeling at ease. Those months at Merrywood had taught him, as nothing else could have done, the duties and responsibilities of his

new position. Nor could it be denied that he enjoyed that position, with its importance, its atmosphere of wealth and luxury. And he had come to San Giuliano with the deliberate purpose of compelling Yolande to yield to his demands respecting Ambrose's religion, and in the event of her ultimate refusal, he had resolved to remove the boy from his mother's custody, take him back to Merrywood, and let her take what steps she chose to regain possession of him, or dissolve the marriage. This was the program which the very sight of her had so promptly frustrated. He loved her far too well to inflict such a sorrow upon her. He could not separate mother and child. Rather than that he would go on living this double life, never telling his parents, and coming sometimes at long intervals to see Yolande and the boy. . . .

Ambrose improved daily; with the splendid vitality which so often characterizes even frail and delicate children he fought his way back to life. And as the warmer days came he regained strength. Gifford had been for nearly a month at San Giuliano, and already the almond-blossom was showing its drifts of pale pink foam, and the gorse was covering the hills with golden flame. On tranquil days the sea was ethereally blue, and the soft lines of pansy-colored hills were tenderly painted against the sky of pure sapphire.

But he could not prolong his stay forever. Already his absence was causing comment at Merrywood. Was he slipping back into the old ways? Lord Strode, remembering that frozen

reticence, wondered if, after all, there were hidden things in Gifford's life—things of which he himself knew nothing? Gifford's letters told him little. They were always posted in Genoa, for he did not wish inquiries to be made for him at San Giuliano. If he could not go himself to post them, he sent a messenger. His environment had always had power to influence him, and he was able to put all thoughts of Merrywood aside, just as in the past three months he had put aside all thoughts of Yolande, hardening his heart against her if the memory of her had become too insistent and obtrusive.

"I wish," she said one day, "that you could have been here for Ambrose's birthday. He will be a year old in April."

"But this is only the first of March," he said, "and I'm due back at home as it is."

They were sitting in the loggia, for the day was warm and very still. Already the deep rose-pink of the peach-blossom was beginning to show its tender blots of color among the olive-trees. The buds on the vines were swelling fast, and looked as if they would soon burst their fragile covering of brown glaze.

"Yolande," he said, "I wish I had not to go away. I should like to stay here forever. . . . But I have many duties now that call me home."

"But you will write to me, Gifford," she said, "and that will help to make the time pass more quickly. And then perhaps you will find time to come and see us this summer. I hope Ambrose will be walking about by then." . . . She looked tenderly at the sleeping Ambrose.

"My darling," he said, "haven't you seen that I've come to the cross-roads—and that I have to choose between you and my own people? There is only one way in which we can hope to propitiate them, and you have always refused to consider it. Yet it is a little thing, and all our happiness depends upon it. Can you not look at it reasonably, Yolande, and help me to make everything quite smooth?" He looked at her wistfully. She was silent.

"For his sake"—Gifford pointed to the little dark head—"and for mine—perhaps a little for your own . . . won't you make the sacrifice, Yolande? Surely it is not such a difficult thing? If you will only give in about Ambrose's religion, the rest will be quite easy. My father and mother would love their little grandson . . . and you. . . . No one could help loving you." . . .

"What you ask is impossible," she said. "My child must be a Catholic."

Gifford looked at her wearily.

"But I love you dear," he said. "I can't live without you. You are teaching me that more and more every day. You are the one woman in the world for me."

She said: "It isn't that I don't love you, Gifford. I have always loved you. If it is hard for you, believe it is also very hard for me. But I must think of Ambrose." . . .

"He would never know," said Gifford; "and try as I can, Yolande, I do not see how I am to marry you, and take you back to Merrywood and introduce them to a Catholic grandson. And they are getting old, and I can't be cruel as I used

to be—they have been so broken-hearted over losing Rex.” . . .

She was very white, but her voice was steady as she answered:

“Gifford—I don’t want to keep you back from your duty. But I cannot marry you under those conditions. I must bring up my boy as a Catholic. I’d rather he were a Catholic and nameless.” . . . She looked at him pitifully.

“He can never be nameless,” said Gifford; “he is my son!”

“But if we agreed to part,” she said quietly, “I should keep him in ignorance of his father.” . . .

“In ignorance?”

“I mean when we have settled definitely what we are going to do, and if you decide in this way, I should not see you,” she answered.

“Do you mean that, Yolande? That you wouldn’t let me come here when I wanted to—to see you—to see my son?”

“Yes,” she said; “I have felt this time more than ever that I could not go on letting you come.”

So he was to be exiled eternally from her beloved presence.

“You couldn’t be so cruel, Yolande. Why, it is all I should have to live for.”

“You would have chosen the other things in preference,” she reminded him. “And your coming unsettles me. In a little while I should perhaps forget some of the pain. I should devote myself entirely to Ambrose and papa. Dear Tibby, too, is getting old. I have many duties you see, Gifford.”

"Do you really mean this?" he asked again.

"Yes, Gifford. I have found this last separation very difficult to bear. So we must make an end of it, one way or the other. I must be your wife—or I must never see you. Already you have eaten up almost two whole years of my life. You have made me suffer very much. I am not going to let you spoil all my years . . . all my life." . . .

His face hardened. So that was her plan—her merciless, pitiless and cruel plan. There were to be no half measures. No stealing away from Merrywood whenever he had the chance of spending a few weeks within reach of her, in this country of sun and light and laughing blue sea, no watching the growing up of Ambrose; all this was to form no part of the future. He was to go away and never see her again. . . .

"You can't do that, Yolande," he said. "Ambrose is my son. I have a right to see him. And you must not forget that you are still my wife."

She flashed back at him: "I was never your wife. Once I thought the shame would kill me! Now I am glad, because it gives me my son!"

"But I tell you the boy is mine! I've full rights. He is my heir—the heir to Merrywood. I can take him away from you!"

She felt suddenly cold and sick with fear.

"You can't do that," she said; "why, he's all mine, Gifford. You didn't even know he was in the world till he was six months old. I nearly died when he was born—did you care then?"

She took Ambrose, who had just awakened, from his perambulator, and held him so closely as

if she almost feared that Gifford would seize him there and then and carry him away. Her eyes were wide with horror. He watched her with growing jealousy.

"He is more to you than I am?" he said, with a touch of bitterness.

"I can't say," she said desperately; "once you were all my world. But I'm thinking of his soul. Of what I owe to God in return for him. Do you understand?"

"Yolande—you forget he is mine too." . . .

"No, I don't forget. I'm bewildered now, Gifford. I don't understand. There doesn't seem to be any way out. In a sense he is yours, I suppose, but for so long he was only mine—in the days when I believed that I should never see you again."

"You are saying cruel things to me," he said. "I know I am worthless. Ask my father—he would tell you the same thing. But I did love you. That part of me is true. And I want you to be my wife. I'm sorry that I cannot marry you under your own conditions. Last year I would gladly have done so. But Rex's death has changed everything. I have other duties—I can't neglect them. Duties to my parents—to the property. You must see that I can't have my children brought up in your faith. It isn't that I've got a single prejudice against it, because I haven't. I think it's the most beautiful religion in the world. But you are a sensible woman, you must distinguish between what is possible and what is impossible! He is the heir, and you must think of him."

"I am thinking of him," said Yolande.

"Then don't try and make vicarious sacrifices. The boy himself will be the first to thank you when he grows up!"

She quoted almost beneath her breath:

"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world—and suffer the loss of his soul?"

There was no sign of wavering in the dark eyes, the compressed lips.

"And I count for nothing!" His mirthless laughter echoed drearily. "Well, I shall fulfil my destiny, Yolande, and go down to hell—and you will have helped to push me over the precipice with your petty shibboleths and counsels of perfection, that are only fit for nuns, not for men and women of the world!"

"I am not a woman of the world, Gifford. And I did a wicked thing in the eyes of my Church, though I acted in ignorance. But I can expiate it. And, above all, I can bring up my boy to be a good Catholic, I can give him his heritage of faith. And I shall teach him that it is a greater inheritance than anything else the world can offer him."

She rose and carried Ambrose into the house. Gifford remained sitting there alone. He could see no way out. Both ways were beset with obstacles and difficulties which he could not overpass. But he realized that if he chose Merrywood and all that it stood for, he should never again see Yolande; he should never again hear her voice. And this was the price he would have to pay. . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

RATHER more than a year later, when Ambrose Lumleigh had just passed his second birthday, Mr. Prendergast went to San Giuliano to pay another visit to Major Pascoe. Spring had come early, and in that sheltered part of the Italian coast it seemed almost as if summer had already arrived. Wistaria and Banksian roses were in full bloom at the little villa which seemed to be set in a perfect bower of fragrant blossom. The vines showed their curly golden shoots, and the chestnut woods were bright with emerald verdure.

Nothing of much importance had occurred to the little group at the Villa Viola since Gifford's departure the year before. He had left on the morning following his conversation with Yolande, and on all sides his departure had been regarded as final. She had begged him not to write and not to come back. And so far he had obeyed. He had gone back to Merrywood, and had since vouchsafed no sign.

Ambrose had greatly improved in health. He was now an almost sturdy little boy, though still small for his age. He was extremely active and restless and ran about the whole day. He was not a pretty child, but his somber dark eyes made him rather attractive-looking. He could chatter volubly in English and Italian, but in ap-

pearance he was much more Italian than English.

Mr. Prendergast was a little, old white-haired man, with a small chiselled face and kind eyes. He was always welcome, and on this occasion he had invited himself, for he desired to offer counsel and advice to Major Pascoe and Yolande.

Outwardly they were little changed. Major Pascoe was somewhat more gray, but the quiet regular life suited him, and he had been free of late from heart attacks. Yolande was still the same sweet and beautiful woman, perhaps a little more silent, a little more grave. She was completely wrapped up in Ambrose, while old Tibby's devotion continued to lavish itself upon both mother and son. Miss Tibbit was not the kind of person who changes greatly. A little stouter—a little heavier, but still kind, competent and vigilant. She was quite ready to undertake the task of instructing Ambrose when he should arrive at an age for lessons. Even now he knew his letters, and could stumble through *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*. Children, she said, could learn to pray as soon as they could speak. He could say his grace and cross himself, and when they walked as far as the village, Tibby always took him into the church and taught him to genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament. She still governed the little household to whom she was so dear. More than eleven years had passed since she had first established herself with them in the Pension Constantine.

Mr. Prendergast arrived in time for the mid-day *déjeuner*. It was not till about an hour later that he found himself alone with Major Pascoe, in the room which for so long had served him as a den.

He lit a cigarette, the major his pipe. They smoked for some minutes in silence. Then Mr. Prendergast cleared his throat and said: "Yolande isn't looking at all strong. Do you think she needs a more bracing climate?"

"She always dislikes the thought of leaving this place," said the Major. "And we cannot afford very much in the way of trips and change. You see, we have the villa rent free, and Tibby's a wonderful manager. I don't know how she does it."

"Mr. Lumleigh, of course, contributes nothing?" said Mr. Prendergast.

"He wanted to—he wrote to me about it once, just as he was leaving last year. But Yolande simply wouldn't hear of it—wouldn't in any way recognize his claim." He paused a moment and then continued: "She's fretting her heart out over the whole thing, Prendergast—it's useless to deny it. She was really very fond of Lumleigh, and she has felt his desertion, for that is what it amounts to, very much. His refusal, as it were, to put things square. But Ambrose's religion was the crux—that is where the negotiations broke down. She won't give in—and he won't give in. She is like her dear mother—soft as velvet till you are up against the bedrock of it all, which is her religion. Wonderful thing—the

Catholic Faith, Prendergast! The strength it gives to quite weak people! I wish I'd been brought up in it—I should have been a better man and a better father. But then, you see, I know what it has done both for Veronica and Yolande—and what I hope it may also do for the dear little chap!"

Mr. Prendergast's attitude to religion in general was a very mild and gentle and almost reverent scepticism. It was, in his opinion, a great pity that people couldn't agree about it—that it should separate husbands and wives, and be permitted to complicate life, which was already such a tangled web.

"Of course, Tibby's always been dead against Lumleigh," continued Maxim Pascoe. "She always thought he didn't mean to legalize the marriage. Yet whenever I've seen him I can't help saying that I've been agreeably impressed by him, and Heaven knows, I was as prejudiced against him as it is possible to be. Very frank—plain-spoken and candid—yet all the time I knew the fellow wasn't straight. He was very much in love with Yolande, and delighted with the boy, but not at all prepared to sacrifice anything for either of them."

"When was he last here?"

"About a year ago," said the Major. "They had rather a flare-up at the end. He came just when Ambrose had had that operation for pleurisy, and we were very anxious. Lumleigh was anxious too—at one time we could hardly keep him out of the nursery. Well, I thought then he was quite prepared to marry Yolande on her own

terms. Not a bit of it! The boy mustn't be brought up a Catholic. I think he had an idea that he was, in any case, to be allowed to come here and see them whenever he deigned to spare the time. But Yolande was quite firm about that. If he decided not to accept her terms, he was to go away altogether. I think myself she was quite right. It was wearing her to pieces. It didn't give her a chance of settling down here—it made her restless and miserable. So he went away. I wonder he hasn't taken steps to dissolve the marriage."

"But I think that is what he means to do"—Mr. Prendergast uttered this sentence very slowly and deliberately—"though it remains to be seen whether he will face the publicity which it would entail. I know he hasn't said a word about it to his parents yet—they are still in absolute ignorance of the whole affair. But if he should tell them, I am advised that he intends to carry out the threat which he made to Yolande last year, and take Ambrose away from her."

"Oh, he can't do that!" cried Maxim Pascoe sharply; "the child is hers. The Holy See regards the marriage as invalid, owing to the existence at the time of the marriage of another wife, and therefore it holds the child illegitimate."

"But in England the child is legitimate," said Mr. Prendergast. "Lumleigh knows what he's talking about when he says he has a father's claim on the boy. He can take him away and bring him up exactly as he pleases." . . .

"And do you mean to tell me that he intends to do that?"

"To the best of my belief," said Prendergast. He threw away the end of his cigarette, and selecting another, lit it with great precision. "And my advice to you, Pascoe, is to go away. To hide—to keep the boy from Lumleigh." . . .

"He's no right whatever to the child!" cried Major Pascoe warmly.

"Indeed, he has every right. He can take him away from her, and, depend upon it, that is what he intends to do directly he can screw up the courage to tell Lord Strode about his clandestine marriage."

"It'll be over my dead body!" cried Maxim.

His live body, reflected Mr. Prendergast, was not very powerful to resist a determined attack.

"I want to put the matter very clearly to Yolande and let her decide. But my advice is—to vanish and cover up your tracks. Miss Tibbit can continue to act as a policeman and a watchdog. And I should advise you to go soon—and to go far." . . .

"I think you are an alarmist. I can't believe Lumleigh would do it," said Major Pascoe.

"Well, I have warned you," said Mr. Prendergast, "and I advise you not to delay. Remember, Lumleigh has been quiet for more than a year. And for nearly three years the young couple have absolutely failed to come to an agreement, though it is quite certain they were fond of each other, and desired to legalize the tie that existed between them. These efforts having failed, it is, after all, only natural that Lumleigh should endeavor to gain possession of his son, and

bring him up in such a manner as shall eventually admit of his inheriting the estates."

"But I don't believe—bad as he is—that he'd do anything so outrageously cruel!"

"Is there any chance of Yolande communicating with him?"

"She won't, of course, if it means running any risk about the boy. She has made, you see, such immense sacrifices for him already."

"Haven't you done talking business yet?" Yolande appeared in the doorway leading Ambrose by the hand. "I want Mr. Prendergast to see Ambrose before he goes out for a walk. Go and say *buon giorno* to that gentleman, Ambrose darling."

The child obeyed immediately, and lifted his face to be kissed.

It was a small, thoughtful little face, rather too pale and serious for such a young child.

Mr. Prendergast was a bachelor, and his attitude towards little children was very largely tempered with fear.

"That's a bonny little man!" he said in a conciliatory tone, chucking Ambrose under the chin—an attention to which he was wholly unaccustomed. "That's a bonny little man," repeated Mr. Prendergast, nodding and smiling; "stick to him, Yolande—that is my advice."

"But of course I shall," said Yolande, "I have never been away from him a single day. And nobody wants him except his mother and Tibby, and of course papa," and she laid her hand affectionately on her father's arm.

"Are you quite sure of that, my dear?" said Mr. Prendergast, who still regarded Yolande as something of a child.

She colored. "Hasn't papa told you that Gifford chose Merrywood when it came to the point?" Tears slowly filled her dark eyes. "If he wants anything he wants to get rid of us."

"Of *you*, my dear, perhaps, but not of Ambrose. Sons and heirs like that aren't to be had for the asking."

"He can't inherit," said Yolande stubbornly. She hated speaking of her affairs to any one, even to her father; she never did so unless she were obliged.

"Whether he can inherit or not, he must eventually succeed to the title. He *is* the heir, and all the religions in the world won't alter that. He'll be Lord Strode if he survives his grandfather and his father."

Yolande turned very white. "What do you mean?" she said quickly; "he belongs to me, and I don't intend to give him up."

"You might be made to, though," said Mr. Prendergast. He watched her face to see the effect of his words upon her.

"Do you mean the law could compel me?"

"Your marriage was regular and legal according to English law. They have a right to the boy."

"What shall I do?" She looked piteously from one to the other.

Mr. Prendergast repeated the advice he had given to Major Pascoe earlier in the afternoon.

"Go—where he can't find you—where he can't

trace you—while he is still making up his mind what steps to take. I have learned that this is his most probable game—to get possession of the boy. If you want to frustrate him go soon, before he makes his final plans!”

“Papa—papa—I can’t believe Gifford would do it! I can’t believe it!” She choked back a sob.

“But he has threatened you with it, my dear,” said Major Pascoe. “You told me so—after he went away last time.”

“Oh, I never thought he meant it,” she said. She went out of the room, still leading Ambrose, ashamed that they should see her tears.

Mr. Prendergast turned to Major Pascoe.

“Wonderful that she can still trust him,” he murmured.

“She loves him,” said Maxim; “she loves a rotten worthless man as her mother did before her. Only Veronica gave me a kind of straightening out. I wouldn’t have gone against her over the little girl for all the money in the world!”

“She won’t refuse to go, I hope?” said Mr. Prendergast.

“Oh, I think she’ll go all right—for the boy’s sake. But we were so settled and happy here—we had found a soft thing for once in our lives. It’s a lovely place and a delightful climate—and it will be very difficult to decide where to go to.”

“Off the beaten track—somewhere where he can’t trace you,” said Mr. Prendergast.

Major Pascoe was, however, not called upon to make provision for his daughter’s flight. Not

that he would have shirked the task had he been permitted to undertake it. Late that same night his bell was heard to ring, and Yolande, rising, went immediately to his room. He was lying propped up by pillows, breathing with difficulty, gray in the face, with an odd bluish shadow about his mouth. She was not at first greatly alarmed, for she had often seen him before in one of his heart-attacks. Having given him the usual remedies, she ran and woke Tibby, begging her to send a messenger for the doctor. Then she quietly returned to his room.

He was speaking to himself in short, quick gasps. . . .

"Veronica mustn't blame me," he muttered deliriously; "I never saw the man in my life till after the marriage. I never introduced them. It all happened when I was ill in Boulogne. . . . I couldn't help it." . . .

"Papa," she said desperately; "you mustn't fret about that. It wasn't your fault—it was mine." Her voice was appealing. He feebly put out his hand and clasped hers.

"My dear little girl—my dear little girl," he said, "you must do the best you can for Ambrose when I'm gone. . . . Make him a good Catholic . . . after all that is what matters most. . . . Tibby will help you—Tibby is an old rock. Keep Tibby with you, darling." . . .

She sat by his side until the dawn came—wonderfully golden in the eastern sky, whitening the sea to silver. Through the open window came the fresh scent of dew-wet roses. A bird twit-

tered. The soft and perfumed air seemed to revive him for a moment.

"Are you there, darling?"

She crept closer.

"Papa," she said gently.

"You couldn't help it—you were cheated," he said, and his blue eyes looked at her with a gaze that had become slightly vague. "You were only a child. Veronica mustn't blame me. . . . Well, dear—you have got Tibby and Ambrose—you won't be quite alone."

The last time he spoke he said only the one word *Veronica*, and looked past Yolande with eyes that were open, bright, smiling, and oddly confident. . . .

Thus died Maxim Pascoe. . . .

And Tibby came and took Yolande away, and put her to bed with loving tenderness, just as if she had been a little girl again.

Almost immediately after the funeral the three survivors of the little party at the Villa Viola packed up their possessions and journeyed forth into a world that must, they felt, surely prove large enough to hide them from all pursuers.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PARENTS with marriageable daughters looked anew towards Merrywood when after a period of mourning the family emerged once more from the obscurity dictated by such a severe and sudden bereavement. It was not only in the eyes of his parents that Gifford appeared in a new light. He was impressing the fact of his abrupt reformation upon many others, outside his own family circle. In the old days he had been a subject for regret on the part of well-intentioned persons, and for gossip among those more maliciously inclined. Some had been found to pity him before the news of that disastrous first marriage had brought him into such fierce publicity. It was said that his father treated him with harsh severity, and that this had made the boy wild and reckless. Parents with young and susceptible daughters had been the first to take alarm at those untoward reports, which permeated to the neighborhood with so strong a savor of verisimilitude. When nothing else could be said to his discredit it was alleged that a fresh array of debts had come to Lord Strode's knowledge, plunging him in new disgrace. The daughters themselves, less ready to believe ill of one so handsome and attractive, still regarded him as the misjudged vic-

tim of unique parental harshness. They were ready to fall in love, and Gifford had always been ready to be fallen in love with. More than one girl besides Kathleen Purflete had dreamed of the day when she should be Mrs. Gifford Lumleigh. But Gifford had made no vows; on the first hint of serious expectations of marriage he became elusive and invisible. Then the news of his early and rash marriage with a pretty and common little actress hit more than one aspirant pretty hard. At the age of twenty-two he returned home—forgiven, but still under a cloud—having, as all the world then knew, divorced his wife. He was cold-shouldered mercilessly, and went nowhere. He felt this new position, it was said, very keenly; it wounded his pride. Then came Boulogne—the sweet summer days spent with Yolande; the little love drama enacted at the Villa Falaise and afterwards at the Châlet des Pins. Nothing was known in and about Merrywood of the next few months, though there were reports never substantiated of a second marriage quite as unsuitable as the first. These rumors never reached Lord Strode's ears, though there had been another grave quarrel, and after Rex's death Gifford came back and took up his abode permanently at Merrywood. He was the heir; his father had forgiven him. It must have been false—that absurd story of a second marriage and of a wife who had left him within six weeks! People began to sum up the things in his favor, forgetting the old days. A pretty property with plenty of money—Lord Strode could not

possibly be spending a fourth of the Lumleigh income. A reformed young man who had sown all his wild oats and now promised to sustain the family tradition of calm and unnotorious respectability. It was known that Lord Strode desired a marriage for his son with Lady Kathleen Purflete. Lord FitzGrave was willing to part with his daughter in consideration of the quite extraordinary handsome settlements that were proposed. And Cat herself was not unwilling. To her intimate friends she declared her confidence in her own ability to "lick the Lumleigh cub into shape." They were aware, however, that she had been in love with him for five years through good and evil report, and she was beginning to feel that it was time to settle down. But in spite of these promising preliminaries the matter hung fire. The young man had burned his fingers in too fierce a flame to hazard a second matrimonial venture. People revived the story of the clandestine second marriage and of an unacknowledged son. Renewed coldness sprang up between Lord Strode and Gifford owing to his obdurate refusal to marry Lady Kathleen. It was said that Lady Strode had had an affecting explanatory interview with the girl. But to outward appearance little seemed changed at Merrywood. Gifford had been living there now for more than two years. During all that time he had only once been abroad.

Lady Kathleen married that summer. She was now Lady Kathleen Chenevix, and her husband was a neighboring squire. In this matter

she had followed her mother's wise and practical advice. Lord Strode apparently accepted the fact of Gifford's reluctance to marry again. The gossip concerning him had not reached his ears, and he never questioned him. Gifford was his right hand, industrious, assiduous, energetic, full of schemes for the improvement of the property. His views on housing, though too modern for his father, were sound and moderate. He talked of standing for Parliament for that division of Sussex.

All the time he was planning and scheming to gain possession of his son. To break the news of his marriage to his father. To obtain his forgiveness through Ambrose. The boy's upbringing should lie in their hands. Only—there must be no severity of the kind he had suffered.

He knew nothing of Major Pascoe's death. That event had been kept out of the English newspapers, and only Maxim's immediate relations had been informed of it. He had been dead to them all for so long that the official information scarcely disturbed them.

Gifford waited his time. He let the months slip by and still he took no steps. He could not bring himself to deal Yolande so mortal a hurt. But Ambrose must be removed from her keeping at as early an age as possible. Four years old—five years old—yes, that must be the limit. He was learning to harden his heart against Yolande. But he could not risk an interview with her. How could he know whether she would not still have the power to call his old passionate

love and devotion once more into being? Finally, the desire to hear news of her triumphed over all other considerations, and in the winter before Ambrose's fourth birthday Gifford announced his intention of going abroad for a few weeks. He had had a slight attack of influenza, and made that his excuse for seeking a warmer climate. He journeyed without delay to San Giuliano. . . .

As Gifford approached the Villa Viola, after nearly three years of absence, he saw that all the green wooden shutters were closely fastened over the windows. They seemed to stare at him like blind unspeculating eyes. A chill February wind blew from the sea; rain was falling softly, in slender silver arrows, but here and there an almond-tree showed its drifts of delicate pink bloom.

He rang the bell and the great green gate swung back; he found himself once more on the familiar white pathway with its palms and oleanders and mournful cypresses. He walked quickly up to the house with a strange misgiving in his heart. It looked so cold—so empty—so uninhabited, as if some sudden plague had carried away its inmates. The old and deaf Italian woman who appeared at the door shook her head in reply to his questions.

"Where is la Signora Lumleigh?" he demanded.

She shook her head, and waved indefinitely towards those dim and blotted mountains of the south.

"Gone?" A sick fear invaded his heart. "Where to?"

Again she shook her head, shrugged her shoulders.

"How can I tell? The signora never said. It was a long, long time ago, more than a year—nearly two years. It was soon after her father died. The little boy must have been about two years old. To France, perhaps?" She made this suggestion with brightening face as if it had been the result of quite unusual intelligence. "For they came from France—did they not?—la signora and her father—before the baby was born. She remembered the night of his birth. She had been told that an English lady—very young, very beautiful, lay dying at the Villa Viola—and that the priest had been sent for to give her the Last Sacraments, and baptize the little boy." Her garrulous reminiscences were scarcely intelligible to Gifford, for his Italian was very limited, still he could catch the drift of her incoherent mumblings.

"They didn't leave any address?" he said.

His voice was raised now almost in anger. His eyes were sullen and resentful. He did not believe that she was ignorant as to Yolande's whereabouts. But she only shook her head and raised her hands in gesticulation.

"They left none. They went away suddenly and quickly—directly after the old gentleman's death. The old lady went also—it was said that she never left la signora—was as a mother to her. Yes—it was in April nearly two years

ago. The weather was very hot, and the child had been ailing." . . .

April—two years ago. This was February—she had been gone almost two years. He felt bewildered. Always he had pictured her here, living quietly, tranquilly, with her father and child and old Tibby. And Major Pascoe was dead—and she and Tibby and Ambrose had vanished. . . .

"I don't understand," he said, more to himself than to the shrivelled old woman who continued to address him in voluble Italian.

He felt cold and sick, almost ill. How much he had desired to see Yolande he had not realized, until he had come here only to find her gone.

"I don't understand . . ." he said again.

Then a sudden idea occurred to him.

"May I come in and see the house?"

"But certainly if the Signore wishes it. It is all quite empty and clean. La Marchesa to whom it belongs wishes to find a tenant for it." She held the door wide open and he entered the narrow white-washed hall.

First into the great lofty sitting-rooms that had served as dining-room, drawing-room, and study. Wide, white, spacious, empty. He remembered her telling him long ago in Devonshire that she liked large, empty rooms, white and wide, with the sun pouring in. It had been a reaction from the tiny stifling apartments she had known in her childhood in Boulogne. Signing to the old woman not to follow him, he went

upstairs into the nursery where they had both watched over Ambrose in that grave illness of his. He opened the window, throwing back the wooden shutters and fastening the big hooks that secured them.

White—wide—empty. But there was no sunshine to-day to fill it. Only that low, gray sky that blurred the hills and blotted out the immense shape of Porto Fino. The gray tempestuous sea, even from this distance, showed its bars of sullen white foam in broken flashes. The cypresses stood up like a group of stern watchful sentinels. The pergolas were empty of vines; the fig-trees were bare and showed only stiff knotted branches. He thought he had never seen such desolation. All the furniture had been removed, for the Marquise intended to let the villa unfurnished for a term of years. In imagination he could see Ambrose's little cot drawn up near the fire, and the small dark head showing among the white pillows. And Yolande sitting beside him, tired and pale with long watching, but beautiful in her tender maternal devotion. He bent down and kissed the floor where her feet had once trodden. Why had he not written? Why had he kept away from her? He had not even tried to see her for nearly three years.

He wandered through room after room like a restless ghost. His own footsteps echoed dully. Every room was empty, and darkened by those closed wooden shutters. Outside, the combined sobbing of trees and wind and sea.

Somewhere—out there in the world—in some place he did not know—Yolande was hiding from him—hiding with her boy. . . .

This room had been her own sitting-room where he had seen her playing with Ambrose. There was a cupboard in one corner and he opened it. On one of the shelves there was a little bow of pale blue velvet ribbon. He recognized it as similar to one that Yolande had worn on her white dress, on the night he had dined there when Ambrose was so ill. He took it up reverently and held it to his lips. Yes . . . he loved her. If he could have found her then she might have made her own terms. . . .

Ambrose was nearly four years old—quite a big boy. He could always judge the approximate stage of his development by recalling what Robin had been about eighteen months before. There was about that difference between their ages, perhaps a little more. Four years old—a charming age, full of small activities and eager-nesses, sweet and winning, yet full of mischief. He thought of Ambrose with a forlorn pride. Running about everywhere, hardy and independent for his age, giving little shrieks of delight; he could imagine the child's gay laughter and how Yolande's would mingle with it. And Tibby in the background, though the familiar figure of "Papa" had vanished. He had never liked Tibby, with her uncompromising frankness and undisguised hostility, but he would have given ten years of his life to have seen her then, and heard from her lips news of his darling.

For a month longer he made search—through

France and Italy. Inquiries at Boulogne led only to a blind alley of failure. The Marquise de Solignac was spending the winter in Kandy. Nothing had been heard or seen there of Major Pascoe and his daughter for some years. Gifford caught cold in Rome, where he was following up a faint clue that later proved a false one. Reluctantly he turned his face homeward. It was ill searching for her in so large a world.

He reached Merrywood early in April. The weather was wintry; the sharp white sky had the leaden opaque look which presages snow. He felt the cold, and as he entered the hall he coughed. The cough struck fear into Lady Strode's heart even before she saw his great gaunt figure, his thin haggard face, confronting her with the saddest expression she had ever seen.

"Welcome home, my darling," she said, kissing him. There were new and deep lines in her tragic white face. "I thought you were never coming."

"I know," he said; "it has been a long time—a long time."

Long, futile, wasted. Two months of bitterest torment. And now he had come back, and seemed to be standing there amid the ruins of his own broken hopes. . . .

"But you are burning hot, dear," she said, touching his hand.

He drew it abruptly away.

"You're not ill, Gifford dearest?" There was terror in her eyes, the eyes of a woman who has already seen one beloved son lying dead.

"Oh, I've only got a bit of a cold. It was

very cold traveling home." He coughed again.

Later, when pneumonia had him in its hard, relentless grip, he wrung his mother's heart by calling her Yolande in a voice she had never heard, but which seemed to hold the very quintessence of passion and devotion. Yolande? She cast her mind back. That surely was the name of that Boulogne girl. What had she been to her son? She remembered only too well the scene that there had been when Gifford had passionately declared his intention of marrying her. That was a long time ago—more than a year before Rex's death, and Rex had already been dead more than three years.

Gifford's illness was not a long one, but to his mother, who watched him with a heart torn with anxiety and suspense, it had seemed to last through an eternity of pain. Just before the end he looked up, and said in a voice of indescribable tenderness:

"Dear heart—you must keep Ambrose. He was always more yours than mine. I wanted him—but I didn't like to take him away from you, Yolande." . . . The words trailed off into a weak whisper.

Ambrose? His father and mother caught at the name—unknown to them. Lady Strode bent over Gifford.

"Where is Ambrose?" she said.

"I don't know," he said; "they have left San Giuliano." And then a wandering delirium supervened; he never knew nor spoke to any one again. . . .

CHAPTER XXIX

MR. HURRELL journeyed down to Merrywood to be present at the funeral of Gifford Lumleigh. He saw no one when he first arrived, for Lord Strode, completely broken by this second bereavement, was unable to receive any one, and his wife did not leave him. Both, however, were present at the last sad rites in Merrywood Church, and upon their return to the Place they intimated to Mr. Hurrell that they would see him in the library.

The task from which Gifford had shrunk for so long had now devolved upon the lawyer, and he wondered how they would receive the news he had to impart. He had a copy of Gifford's will with him, in which he had left all the fortune over which he had any control to his beloved wife, Yolande Mary Veronica Lumleigh, in trust for his son Ambrose. The document had been confided to his care with the utmost secrecy; it had been drawn up and signed on the day Gifford had passed through London, on his way home from that futile final journey to San Giuliano.

"You know of course, Mr. Hurrell," said Lord Strode, "that my heir is now Robin Lumleigh—Sydney Lumleigh's boy. He is quite a little child—not six years old—and if anything should happen to me there will be a very long minority."

Mr. Hurrell cleared his throat.

"You are not aware, my lord," he said gravely, "that your son has left a wife and child?"

"A wife and child!" echoed Lord Strode.

Lady Strode turned very pale. She had half hoped and half dreaded from her son's dying ejaculations that there might be some direct claimant to title and estates. She bent forward a little.

"He was married, then?" she said. And as she said the words she told herself that she had always suspected it—that never through all those years had his heart been at Merrywood. He had lived there under the same roof with his parents, discharging all his duties great and small, carefully, precisely, but frozenly. All the time there was some one in the world whom he had loved . . . some one who had borne him a son. . . .

"Yes—he was married nearly five years ago in London to a Miss Yolande Pascoe, whom he met in France—in Boulogne, I believe."

"Then why did he never tell us? Why did he never bring her here?" said Lord Strode incredulously. "Has she written to you? Has she made any claim?"

"He knew that he could not bring her here without incurring your displeasure," said Mr. Hurrell, in his cold precise tone, "and far from making any claim, she has persistently denied that she was ever his wife. She refused to take any steps to ratify her marriage, which from her point of view was no marriage at all. She was a Catholic, and you are aware, no doubt, that a

Catholic cannot marry a man who has a divorced wife living. At the time of her marriage to your son his divorced wife, Mrs. Harrison, was still alive. Miss Pascoe—or rather Mrs. Lumleigh—did not know of her existence till she had been married some weeks. When she discovered it she left your son at once and returned to Boulogne, and I believe that she and her father then went to live in Italy, where some months later her child—a son—was born. Your son knew nothing of their whereabouts, and he was not aware that a child had been born to them until the following year, when he accidentally discovered them living near San Giuliano. By this time Mrs. Harrison was dead, and there was nothing to prevent the young people from satisfying the ecclesiastical authorities by going through a second ceremony of marriage. But Mrs. Lumleigh is, I understand, a devout Catholic, and she refused to do this unless Mr. Lumleigh promised that she might continue to bring up her child Ambrose in her own faith. The same conditions also applied to any subsequent children that might be born to them. I understand that on this point she was adamant! Your son was just about to accede to these terms when a telegram reached him informing him of his brother's death. From that day he was torn in two by the conflicting claims of his duty to his wife and his duty to the property. After prolonged consideration he made up his mind to go and claim his son, and bring him here to plead for your forgiveness. He deferred doing this on account of the terrible wound it would inevi-

tably inflict upon his wife. He went to San Giuliano in February, and there learned that Major Pascoe—his wife's father—had died there about two years ago, and that she and her child had left the villa in company with an elderly governess. He was quite unable to trace them. The rest you know."

"This child is being brought up as a Catholic by his mother?" said Lord Strode.

"Yes," replied Mr. Hurrell; "I had an interview with Mr. Lumleigh when he passed through town last week on his return from Italy. I drew up this will in accordance with his instructions, and in it he has left all his property to his wife in trust for his son. He seemed quite broken-hearted that he had not been able to find either of them. He was extremely attached to his wife, but he could see no way out of the difficulty except to remove the boy from her custody and bring him up a Protestant. The marriage, I need not say, was perfectly legal in England, and though he sometimes talked of having it dissolved on account of the irregularity which existed from her point of view, he took no steps to achieve this."

Lord Strode stood up.

"This is an extraordinary story, Hurrell," he said, "and to convince me of the truth of it you will have to produce all available documents. It is inconceivable that my son should have gone on living here year after year, never saying a word to any one about his marriage."

"There was the religious difficulty. He hoped, I believe, that the mother might, in course

of time, for the boy's sake come to yield on this point. But there was never any sign of her doing so. I have documents which admit of no doubt as to his legal claim, and I think they will satisfy you. It is a very sad and in some ways a very tragic story, and I hoped for a long time that they would come to some mutual arrangement which would put an end to their separation. Especially," and now his keen eyes searched Lord Strode's face with a penetrating gaze, "especially since I understand the regard was mutual, and that Miss Pascoe was so very much in love with him that she consented to a clandestine marriage. Even her father knew nothing of it, nor did the Marquise de Solignac, with whom she was staying in London when it took place."

"There is only one thing to be done," said Lord Strode, "and that is to find them. Surely when she hears that her husband is dead, and that the boy is heir to a large and important property, she will consent to bring him here."

"She will not, my lord," said Mr. Hurrell, "if there is the slightest danger to his faith."

"Of course he must be brought up as a Protestant," said Lord Strode; "otherwise he will inherit only an empty title. The boy belongs to his father's family. He must be educated as we wish. How old is this—this person, Mr. Hurrell?"

The lawyer made a brief mental calculation. "She must be now about twenty-three years old, my lord," he said.

"Twenty-three! And does she think we are

going to be dictated to by a child of twenty-three? Gifford—poor boy—must have behaved in an extraordinarily weak manner to her. He could not have used his authority at all!”

“But, you see, she did not recognize his authority. In the eyes of her Church she was not his wife at all, and I believe that the Holy See also regards the child as illegitimate, since no subsequent marriage took place between his parents.”

“But you are satisfied that he is legitimate?”

“There is no question about that at all, my lord. And Mr. Lumleigh seemed to think that his wife was beginning to fear that he might come and claim the boy and take him away, and that was the reason for her very abrupt departure from San Giuliano. We think she is perhaps traveling under an assumed name, and that Miss Tibbit, her old governess, is pretending to be her mother. But this is only guesswork. We have absolutely no idea of their present whereabouts.”

“And how old is this boy now?” inquired Lord Strode.

“He will be four years old this month, my lord.”

“Four years old . . .” repeated Lady Strode. She could recall how charming and winning Gifford had been at that endearing age. She wondered if little Ambrose resembled him.

“We must find him and take him away from his mother’s influence. While he is still so young, it can have made no lasting impression upon him,” said Lord Strode sternly. “We

shall allow her to have access to her son only on condition that she does not interfere with his religious education."

He glanced over the pages of the will. Yes—there was no doubt of it. Gifford had married this woman, and had left a son to succeed him. He felt a thrill of pride that he had a grandson in the world who was heir to the family honors. Well—this poor misguided woman had made a plucky fight for the possession of her boy—but they could not afford to have any sentimental compassion for her. The time had come when she would have to give him up.

"You'd better advertise, Hurrell," were his parting words to the lawyer as he took his leave that night; "we can offer a very large reward for any information that leads to the discovery of this Mrs. Lumleigh's whereabouts. We must not leave any stone unturned in the matter."

The first intimation that Yolande had of Gifford's death was the advertisement which appeared in innumerable French and Italian papers as well as in the leading English ones. She was living in Palermo at the time under the name of Mrs. Chesson—her mother's maiden name—and she was already supposed to be a widow with one little boy.

Maxim's pension had died with him, and Yolande's own pittance was so small that it barely sufficed for their simple needs, even when it was supplemented by Tibby's tiny income. But living was cheap in Palermo, and she had found rooms in an old convent, so secluded and obscure

that none of the English residents in the town were aware of her presence there.

Yolande at twenty-three years of age was perhaps more beautiful than she had ever been, even in the first entrancing loveliness of her girlhood. But her eyes were very sad; she had still the look of one who has emerged from great perils and carries the remembrance forever in her heart.

She devoted herself to the care of Ambrose, and the child from being always with his mother and Tibby was rather old-fashioned and advanced for his age. In this he resembled the Italian children, who develop earlier than those of more northern countries. He still spoke Italian more fluently than he did English, and, like his mother, he spoke his own language with a slight foreign accent and without flattening the "r" in the English way. Thus he often passed for an Italian child, and, indeed, he was so dark as to be almost Sicilian-looking. He now accompanied his mother to Benediction every afternoon in the convent chapel, and little by little she had begun to teach him those great mysteries of his faith which are so wonderfully easy for little children to learn. He could repeat a good deal of his catechism, which he learned in English. Their little world seemed a very happy one, and tranquil after great storms; it was also secure, apart and hidden. Yet, if ever Gifford had come and found her, Yolande knew that he would have had the power—even as he had always had—to wake anew that slumbering and only half-slain love which lay hidden in her heart.

Even fear could not kill it—that sickening fear which had driven her into still further exile with her son. No other man existed for her. She was not the kind of woman who loves twice.

This was her opportunity to prepare Ambrose for the future, and she made the most of it. Under other circumstances she would have hesitated to force him, for he was a delicate, highly-strung child. But he was very intelligent and eager to learn, and made her task an easy one. Tibby would have liked to have had a larger share in it. But Yolande shook her head. “You’ve taught so many children, Tibby darling—you must let me teach this one!” It was then that he first learned to say his rosary. It was astonishing how quickly he did this, and how soon he knew the right sequence of the Fifteen Mysteries—the Joyful, the Sorrowful and the Glorious. Yolande, upon being closely questioned by her small son, admitted her preference for the Five Sorrowful Mysteries; they were, however, the ones that appealed least to Ambrose then. The Joyful Mysteries, when our Blessed Lord was a child—even those two most mysterious ones before His birth—were those that Ambrose preferred. Benediction he understood and loved, and he envied, above all things, the lot of the little boy who stood near the priest, swinging the censer from whence rose those silver clouds of perfumed smoke. In his baby way he could dimly appreciate the tremendous and passionate drama of the Mass. When the bell rang, he copied his mother’s action and bowed his head on his hands. She, watching

him with anxious eyes, wondered if he would ever forget. Would other surroundings ever obliterate those lessons he learned in Palermo? He was so little—so young—he could so easily forget. . . .

Her security had, however, never seemed so assured as on the day when Tibby first drew her attention to the advertisement. She had been laughing and playing with Ambrose in the sunny loggia, when Tibby came out with a grave face. Yolande was quick to take alarm, as all those must be who live perpetually in the presence of a haunting fear that no reason can silence. She ran towards her. "Tibby dear—what is it? You look as if you had seen a ghost. It isn't Gifford?"

"He is dead, my darling," said Tibby compassionately.

She put her arms round Yolande, who sank back into a chair and sobbed in a heart-broken fashion. Dead . . . and she had never even known of his illness. Dead. . . . She had loved him, and then she had feared him, but always he had been unalterably and most passionately dear to her. And he was the father of the little boy who was running about in the sunshine in such unconscious happiness. Presently she turned and took the paper from Tibby's hand. "Let me read it," she said.

"£5,000 Reward.—Above will be paid to any one giving accurate information as to the Whereabouts of Ambrose Maxim Gifford Lumleigh, only son of the late Honorable John Denis Gif-

ford Lumleigh, younger son of Lord Strode, of Merrywood Place, Sussex. The said Ambrose Maxim Gifford Lumleigh is supposed to be with his mother, Mrs. Yolande Mary Veronica Lumleigh (*née* Pascoe); he is about four years of age, and when last heard of was living at the Villa Viola, San Giuliano, near Porto Fino, Italy. Apply Messrs. Hurrell, Hurrell and Mortimer, Littlehampton Street, Strand, W. C."

So Gifford was dead, and had left information concerning his wife and son. . . . She glanced anxiously at Ambrose. Were the sleuth-hounds of the law already upon his track? . . .

"My dear—my dear—you mustn't give way. Please God, they may never find us." . . .

Yolande lifted a frightened tear-stained face.

"Oh, why did he ever tell them?"

Tibby looked straight in front of her with a grim expression.

"They won't find us," she said confidently. "Not till he's learnt what we've got to teach him. . . . I can't believe you've made all your sacrifices in vain."

Yolande shivered in spite of the warmth of the May morning, so delicious a month in Sicily, redolent of the scent of orange-blossom and roses.

"We must pray for Gifford, dear Tibby," she said. "It does not say when he died. I wonder if he ever went back to the Villa Viola and found it empty." She left them and walked

along the cloister and into the little chapel, where the nuns were singing their office in a soft almost melancholy monotone.

He was dead. . . . He would never come back through all the years. She had hoped always in her heart that he would come, and make her his wife under the only conditions that were possible for her. Now that hope, too, was dead. Others less pitiful perhaps than he were now on the track of her child, obviously determined to obtain possession of him, since they had put so high a price upon the information that should lead to his discovery. She was thankful that she had only with her the faithful and devoted Tibby. . . . Tibby who would have died rather than disclose the present whereabouts of Ambrose Lumleigh.

After that day she became very listless. To Tibby she never seemed quite the same again. She entreated her often to take care of herself for the boy's sake, but she had no energy for further effort. She took little food and Tibby knew that she did not sleep much. She kept Ambrose near her all day, as if she were afraid to let him out of her sight. It was at this time, too, that she became extremely devout and pious. She was like a little nun. She rose very early and invariably attended Mass in the convent chapel; her familiar black-garbed figure was seldom absent from its accustomed place. Afterwards she remained fully an hour in uninterrupted meditation, before she went back to her own apartments to join Ambrose and Tibby at the early breakfast of coffee and rolls. And

Tibby noticed that she had little care any longer for her boy's education, except in so far as his religious instruction was concerned. When once Tibby expostulated she only said: "He will have plenty of time to learn the other things afterwards, Tibby. I've learned that this is all that matters." Tibby saw with anguish the rapid change that came over her after Gifford's death. It seemed as if as long as he lived his love had sustained and supported her through the years of separation, but when hope was dead Yolande lost something of her own power to live.

She survived him exactly four months. The August of that year was an unusually hot one, and there was a slight outbreak of cholera in Palermo. Yolande took alarm on account of her boy, and she was meditating flight when she fell ill. Her illness only lasted a few hours, and when it was all over and they had taken her away, to lie in that southern cemetery under the roses and cypress trees, Tibby left Palermo and accompanied Ambrose to Rome.

CHAPTER XXX

SUSAN TIBBIT took her new responsibilities very seriously. Yolande's will appointed her sole guardian of the boy, Ambrose, and she had complete control also of the tiny income which in addition to her own sufficed to support them in the very simple and inexpensive life which they now led. She found rooms in a quiet street in Rome, where they passed an uneventful winter. There was something mature and unchild-like in Ambrose's grief for his mother. He did not see her lying dead—the risk of infection was far too great—but he understood that she had gone away never to come back, and that her soul no longer inhabited her body. Tibby taught him to pray for the repose of his mother's soul, and nightly they said the rosary together for this intention. She confided his history to a Jesuit priest whom she had known for a number of years, and as she now felt herself ageing very much she arranged for him to provide for Ambrose's future, in the event of anything happening to her. She felt tolerably safe about him since Mr. Hurrell's advertisement had for some time ceased to appear in the Italian papers.

Ambrose loved St. Peter's, and a day seldom passed when they did not journey thither to kneel before those glimmering lamps that made

a half circle of light perpetually around the tomb of the Apostle. She had just risen from her knees one day when a small, thin, sharp-faced elderly man approached her smiling.

She thought he was a tourist who had come up to ask her a question, and no inkling of the real truth entered her mind.

"Miss Susan Tibbit?" he said.

Miss Tibbit turned away and walked towards the door holding Ambrose's hand. She held her head loftily. Her name was no concern of any one's, and had she not been in church she would have mentioned this fact. But the man unabashed followed her to the steps of the wide white piazza. It was a day in late April; the air was soft, warm, scented. The sun shone brightly on the playing fountains.

"Miss Susan Tibbit?" he said again. "And this must be Ambrose Lumleigh. My name is Hurrell, and I have instructions to remove this child from your custody, madam, and restore him to his lawful guardians, Lord and Lady Strode."

Miss Tibbit turned very pale and a feeling of sick faintness came over her.

"I am the lawful guardian of this child," she said; "you have no proofs of his identity. His mother left him in my care."

Taking Ambrose's hand she re-entered St. Peter's, and walked back across the beautiful marble floor to the Confession. Signing to Ambrose she made him kneel down by her side.

They knelt together—perhaps for the last

time in this world—and she whispered final counsels to the child.

“Ambrose,” she said; “they are going to take you away from me. Your grandfather is going to claim you. But whatever happens to you, remember that you are a Catholic as your dear Mama was. Never forget to say your rosary every day. Say it always for the repose of her soul. Place your whole trust and confidence in the Sacred Heart of Our Blessed Lord. Pray always to His Blessed Mother to keep you close to her dear Son. Try and remember the things you have been taught—the prayers that you have always said.”

How she prayed—how she would always pray—that the baby mind might store something of the ineffable truths of his faith. He, looking up wonderingly and only half understanding, saw that down the aged seams and furrows of her face the slow difficult tears were coursing. . . .

“Promise, darling,” she said.

“I promise, Tibby. And I’ll say my rosary for you, too. Won’t you come with me?”

“No, darling—I don’t think they will let me come. But you must be a very good boy—a good, obedient boy. Never forget that you are a Catholic and obedient to the Holy Father. Never forget that he once laid his hand on your head and blessed you.” . . .

“Oh, Tibby—you must come with me. . . . I shall want you.” He began to sob; the sight of her tears made him cry.

“They won’t let me,” she answered, pressing him to her.

"Perhaps"—he caught at a spar in the midst of this unimagined wreckage—"perhaps Our Lady will guard me under her robe as she does the little dead children . . . because I shall be alone . . . and frightened. You remember that statue we saw of her where she is keeping the children under her robe?" . . .

"Yes . . . yes . . . my darling," sobbed Tibby.

Mr. Hurrell watched the little scene from afar. He was not quite unmoved. But he had traced the child with all the skilful ingenuity which the law could devise or employ. He had tracked the little party to Palermo, and had heard with some relief of Yolande's death there. That made the task of removing Ambrose an easy one. There was no mother to fight for the possession of this child, only an old governess who had no claim upon him at all.

He wondered how long they were going to remain there. When at last they rose from their knees he went again quietly to the door and met them as they came out.

The sunshine was splendid, blinding and brilliant. Groups of people wandered up the steps, or gazed from the Piazza at the great Basilica—the very center and heart of Christendom.

"If I refuse to let you have him?" she said.

"I advise you not to," he said; "legal proceedings would be taken which are extremely costly and could result in no advantage to you. Now that both his parents are dead his grandfather has sole claim to his custody. Will you permit me to accompany you? We had better drive to save

time. I will remain with you while you pack his things. Lady Strode is in Rome, ready to take him back to England with her. She will probably start to-night."

The sight of her weeping did not deter him from enunciating these facts in his clear level voice.

"Can't I come with him to England? I've been with him ever since he was born. And he's so little—such a baby."

"I do not think Lady Strode would entertain the idea for a moment. You can be quite satisfied that he will be taken every care of. He will enjoy every possible comfort and luxury. Your task is over, Miss Tibbit. We are assured that you have discharged it admirably and faithfully according to your lights. No doubt you will be properly recompensed."

She flashed her old governess-look upon him.

"Any offer of recompense would be an insult!"

They drove down the narrow street, and across the Tiber that gleamed like silver and jade in the sunlight. She said suddenly:

"I don't leave him, mind you, till I've seen and spoken to Lady Strode—and know that this is genuine, and not an attempt to kidnap the boy for the sake of the reward you've been offering!"

It came into his mind then, with a sense of unwilling admiration, that she had been perfectly aware of the very large reward that had been offered for any information to Ambrose's whereabouts. And this woman—no longer

young and, judging from her shabby garments, sufficiently poor—had taken no steps to secure it for herself. In minds which are perpetually occupied with the question of money, the regaining of it, the desire to increase it, the love of possessing it—there is not infrequently a latent appreciation of those people who are professedly and genuinely indifferent to it.

“Oh, you can come and hand over the child yourself. Lady Strode won’t refuse to receive you. We will go to the hotel together to satisfy your natural anxiety on this point!”

“You can tell her if she wants to give me any part of the reward that I shall throw it into the Tiber!” she said.

One saw across long years that had so softened those traces of the martinet, that disciplinarian who had been recommended as specially successful in the management of refractory and unruly children. She had changed since those days into the indulgent unselfish woman, most kind and most enduringly faithful, whom Yolande and Ambrose had successively known and deeply loved.

“I . . . I loved his mother,” she said brokenly. “She was a saint. And I wish with all my heart she had never set eyes on this child’s father. He wrecked her life and abandoned her.”

“Nevertheless her son is Lord Strode’s heir,” said Mr. Hurrell suavely; “and naturally they wish to remove him from all—ahem—foreign influences—while he is still young enough to forget them. There are certain definite things in-

cumbent upon any heir to the Merrywood property—things regarding religion.” He fixed piercing eyes upon her, but Tibby met them unflinchingly. “No doubt you are aware of this, and it provided you with a motive for hiding the child—and for assisting his mother to hide him—with considerable skill and for a very long period. This was, I understand also, the principal cause of disagreement between his parents. My late client would have only been too happy to regularize matters had Mrs. Lumleigh been sufficiently generous to meet him half way.”

“Half way!” There was indignation as well as scorn in her voice. “With us there isn’t any half way! She wasn’t going to deprive him of a heritage infinitely more precious than anything Lord Strode could offer him! She wasn’t going to separate him from the faith she held, and her mother before her! Love of the faith was in her blood, and she had no ambition for her son except that he should grow up a good Catholic, and be faithful to his Church!”

“Very praiseworthy, I’m sure,” said Mr. Hurrell; “and if she had been giving him up to Buddhists or Mohammedans one might have understood her point of view better. But we Protestants are not quite heathens I do assure you, Miss Tibbit! The boy will be educated in good, sound Christian principles, and in a religion that is happily free from the errors of Rome!”

“Don’t dare speak to me,” struck in Miss Tibbit, “of errors in the Infallible Church founded by Our Blessed Lord Himself. That is an impertinence—a blasphemy—I do not permit.”

And she looked at him quite fiercely.

Mr. Hurrell was moved to reluctant apology.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, Miss Tibbit. But there are many of us who, without wishing to be blasphemous, do indeed deny to your Church the infallibility you claim for her. We have wisdom and science on our side. Galileo ——" . . . But he stopped, fearing another outburst. He had not reckoned with such fierce fanaticism. And he could afford to be generous to this woman who had fought so gallantly . . . and had lost.

Later in the day they drove to the hotel where Lady Strode was staying. She was waiting with her husband in their private sitting-room. Lord Strode had only arrived from Florence that afternoon. Mr. Hurrell was present at that meeting—at that poignant parting. Very few words were exchanged. Miss Tibbit did not break down; she was rigid and outwardly unmoved. Far back in her mind was the day when Major Pascoe had engaged her in Boulogne to take charge of his daughter; she seemed to see little Yolande sitting there quietly by the window in the Pension Constantine. She had trained her and taught and served her, and for more than eight months she had successfully eluded the vigilance and unremitting search of every detective department in Europe, and had concealed Ambrose from the world. And now the game was up. She knew that when she saw Lady Strode put out her arms and gather her grandson to her breast. . . .

Her task begun in Boulogne fourteen years ago had come to an end. But as she moved slowly to the door, having made her last farewell, Ambrose broke free from his grandmother and with a wild cry followed her.

“Tibby—Tibby—my darling old Tibby!” . . .

He hurled himself sobbing into her arms. She held him to her, weeping scalding tears. Then she released him, whispering: “Don’t cry, darling. . . . Remember to be a good boy—remember to pray” . . . and with those words Miss Susan Tibbit went out into a lonely and uncompanied world.

CHAPTER XXXI

AMBROSE was overwhelmed with grief. He continued to cry in the loud, abandoned way of children, when the very barriers of self-control are broken down, and sobbing becomes a mechanical action impossible to control or restrain.

"Dear . . . dear . . . " murmured Lady Strode, "can he really have been so attached to this person?" The physiognomy of Miss Tibbit had struck her as more likely to produce awe than affection in the heart of a child.

"Tibby . . . Tibby . . . I want Tibby." . . .

"Don't cry, Ambrose," said Lord Strode. "You are going in the train to-night. And if you cry like this you will be ill and unable to go."

"I don't want to go in the train . . . I want Tibby!" . . . came the despairing wail.

"My dear—I am afraid he has been terribly spoilt," said Lord Strode. His first impression of his grandson had been one of grievous disappointment. He had always expected another Robin—big for his age, sturdy, flaxen-haired and blue-eyed, the typical Anglo-Saxon child. Not this little slim, dark thing, so different from his own two sons at the same age. That mop of dark silken curls was in need of the scissors. The somber eyes—disfigured now with those

passionate tears,—the dark olive complexion, the absence of color, the small slight figure, lean and lithe, struck him as altogether foreign and un-English looking, and he greatly deplored it. Lady Strode looked wistfully for any likeness to Gifford as she stroked the silken black locks. But there was little or none. She remembered the one photograph she had ever seen of Yolande, found among Gifford's papers after his death, and bearing the date of their marriage. It had been taken in London just before that event, and it had given perhaps better than photographs generally do, a vivid impression of that soft dark arresting beauty, the individual charm, the suggestion of youth and innocence. Yes, the child resembled her, although he was not at all pretty. It is not to be denied that both Lord Strode and his wife would have been better pleased to have found a thoroughly British-looking grandchild. Robin fulfilled their ideal so completely that they could have wished this tiny sobbing stranger had resembled him. Yet . . . Gifford's son was at last in her arms, and she felt a strange and devout thankfulness. Sobbing, angry and reluctant . . . but still hers to have and to keep. Oh, she would soon teach him to love her! . . . After all, he was quite an attractive little boy in spite of his odd clothes and long hair. The liquid dark eyes and fine small patrician features compensated somewhat for the plump and rosy cheeks, the blue eyes and flaxen hair she had hoped for. She could understand from the child how beautiful the mother must have been. More beautiful than the old

photograph, a little faded and old-fashioned, yet vividly portraying that alluring loveliness which had held Gifford captive against all the counsels of prudence during the last five years of his life.

But in after years Ambrose visualized those first days apart from Tibby as a period of absolute and complete and almost terrifying darkness. Before that epoch there was a stretch of gray, sad enough it is true, which separated him from that glad period which held the beloved and remembered and beautiful form of his mother. She was always associated in his mind with the splendid Sicilian days, full of hot fierce sunshine, of palms waving lustrously against vivid blue skies, of scented orange-blossom, of fire-flies that illuminated the night with their wandering bright flames. Especially he could recall the sunny loggia where his mother always played with him. Of her he could never remember anything but love—a love which enveloped him like some soft and exquisite aura. No harsh words broke the radiance of those baby reminiscences. It seemed to him then as if he had never been naughty—that goodness was the only possible course open to him; he had experienced only happiness. Never a naughty or high-spirited child, his very rare fits of rebellion or disobedience were always brief, and he had been always with those who understood and forgave, and grieved over these little lapses, which was the most terrible punishment that could have been meted out to him. A tender little world—so full of love and affection that he had imagined all the rest of the world must resemble it.

First there was the long journey. They traveled straight through to Paris, and the blackness and fierce rushing through the night shook the child's nerves to pieces. He was unused to traveling, and the emotions of the day had made him sick and ill. He had not tasted food, but had rejected all offers of nourishment. Lady Strode was supremely patient; she dimly guessed that only by great kindness could this child be won. She occupied a compartment with Ambrose and an English nurse, whom she had engaged to look after him. All through the night she could hear that desolate sobbing. In the morning he could scarcely be induced to partake of the coffee and rolls which were brought to him. He wailed for Tibby's protective presence. He felt himself infinitely deserted. . . . They were all powerless against this devouring nostalgia, for one so familiar and so beloved.

"I think," said Lady Strode in despair, "that Miss Tibbit would be shocked to know what a very naughty little boy you are."

Ambrose was startled. "I'm not a naughty boy. . . . I want my darling Tibby." . . . He began to speak in voluble Italian, which language was still more natural to him than his own. He could evidently express himself more decisively and more forcibly through this medium.

"My dear—I don't understand a word of what you are saying. You must talk English," said Lady Strode, amazed at the eloquent volubility of the baby utterances.

For all answer he flung himself face down-

wards on the seat and sobbed with increased violence. "I want Tibby" . . . he wailed.

Lady Strode had never in her life had so trying a journey. It seemed to her that an eternity had passed before she saw the welcome gates of Merrywood open to admit her carriage. She was tired out, and felt that she would be thankful to see Ambrose safely tucked up in bed. Robin was to be there to try and make him feel at home, and their two cots had been placed in the room that was to serve as a night-nursery. By this time Ambrose was spent and exhausted with emotion. He was quiet enough and seemed to be half asleep when they drove from the station at a late hour. The stars were shining in that dark, soft and tranquil April sky; there was a young moon, and the great bare downs seemed to be slumbering like released sentinels. She was glad to be back—glad, too, that their long search had been crowned with success, and that in their safe keeping was little Ambrose, the only child of their beloved son Gifford.

Ambrose was kept in bed most of the next day; he was very tired and listless, and slept most of the time. Robin was told not to talk to him or go near him, as it was necessary that he should not be disturbed nor excited.

In the evening he awoke, and seeing the nurse, a stranger, sitting near his cot, he suddenly remembered the incident of the journey—that long, dark, endless rushing in the train—and from thence his mind rapidly traveled back to Miss Tibbit, who had been left behind. And he had not said his prayers.

Yes—he had cried a great deal. It was naughty to cry like that. But he had wanted Tibby—and Tibby had been left behind. Tears gathered in his eyes, but he tried to repress them.

“Please give me my beads,” he said to the nurse.

“Go to sleep, Master Ambrose. You can’t have your beads to-night. Her ladyship left word that you were to be very quiet.” . . .

“I will go to sleep,” said Ambrose, “when I have said my prayers. But I must say them first. Please give me my beads.”

“You can’t have them, Master Ambrose,” said the nurse firmly.

“Is he to have them, Mrs. Foote?” she said, turning to the old housekeeper, who had just stolen upstairs to have a look at “Mr. Gifford’s” son.

“Nasty foreign things,” said Mrs. Foote, “all of a piece with their heathenish ways and worshipping graven images! But if they’ll quiet him I’d give them just for to-night, as you’d give a baby a comforter. Take them away again when he’s asleep, for his lordship don’t hold with them, no, nor her ladyship either.”

“How does he come by them?” inquired the nurse, who was new to Merrywood. She put the brown rosary into the child’s hands, and he, closing his eyes, began to slip the beads through his thin little fingers.

Mrs. Foote shook her head sagely.

“His mother was a Papist,” she said in an undertone of concentrated horror; “but he’ll be

brought up a good God-fearing Protestant now, and he'll learn the commandments!"

"One Our Father on the big beads," murmured a very sleepy and contented voice from the bed, "then ten Hail Mary's! One Glory be when you come to the big bead again. . . . I'm going to say the Sorrowful Mysteries for mama's soul . . . and for all the Holy Souls in Purgatory. . . . Mama and Tibby both liked the Sorrowful Mysteries best. . . . But I like the Joyful ones . . . because Our Lord was a little boy then. And I'm quite sure I would rather have been a shepherd than a king; for the shepherds saw the angels and a great host of Heaven . . . it must have been a glorious sight." . . .

"Bless me, what an old-fashioned little piece," murmured Mrs. Foote. "What's put such ideas into his head, I wonder? Well, well, he'll soon forget all about his beads—that's one comfort! Her ladyship will see that he's brought up a good Protestant—she's a staunch Low Churchwoman, same as me!" And she went out of the room.

The sleepy murmur from the bed was still audible. "*Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee . . . blessed art thou among women.*" . . . It was still going on when a few minutes later Lady Strode came into the room to pay a visit to her grandson before going down to dinner.

"Has he been quiet?" she asked.

"Yes, my lady. When he woke up, he asked for his beads—and he's still saying them. I think he will be asleep in a few minutes."

"Oh, but he mustn't have beads," said Lady Strode. "I'm afraid I must take them away." . . . She approached the bed and for a few moments listened to that sleepy murmur: "*Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*" . . .

"Ambrose, dear," she said, "give me those beads. You must go to sleep."

Ambrose clutched his rosary firmly.

"Please—I haven't finished only three mysteries. I'm saying the Sorrowful ones to-night." He rolled the *r* in the word sorrowful.

"Ambrose, dear—you must be a good obedient little boy, and give me those beads when I tell you to. Where is his gollywog, nurse?"

It was before the advent of the Teddy-bear, but Ambrose, unused to gollywogs, had been seized with a chattering fear of the dreadful black face and the thought of such a bed-fellow filled him with terror. He clutched the beads still more firmly, and gave a shriek as the nurse approached him with that fearsome form.

"I want my beads!" cried Ambrose. "I want my beads!"

He flung the gollywog upon the floor. Lady Strode unclasped the tiny fingers and took the rosary away.

"Not to-night, Ambrose," she said. "I'm surprised that you should be so naughty. You shouldn't let Robin see what a naughty boy you can be."

"I'm not naughty," said Ambrose; "it isn't naughty to say prayers." Again he rolled the *r*.

This peculiarity of his speech was always more pronounced when he was excited.

His sobs broke forth afresh, there was anger as well as grief in his reiterated cry of: "I want my beads." . . .

Into the midst of this scene there entered his grandfather. Lord Strode was just going down to dinner when he heard screams emanating from the long, distant passage where the nurseries were situated.

"What a tiresome child that is!" he thought to himself. "I hope he will settle down soon, or we shall all be worn to a shadow!"

"Why, Ambrose, what on earth's the matter? What has he been doing, my dear?" He turned to his wife.

"I want my beads. She's *tooked* them away. . . . And Tibby told me I wasn't never to forget to say my prayers." . . .

"You can't have your beads," said Lady Strode in a firm, but patient voice. "We don't pray to beads here. You must forget what Miss Tibbit taught you. It is very wrong to pray to beads."

Ambrose made no reply, but he made a sudden spring towards his grandmother and snatched the rosary out of her hand. Words pelted forth: "Go away, Grannie. I will have my rosary! It isn't wrong to pray. Tibby told me to! I want Tibby—and I want my beads!"

He sat up in bed, breathless, defiant, his cheeks flaming and his eyes ablaze.

This was altogether too much for Lord Strode.

"No—my dear Eleanor—you must leave him to me. He mustn't be allowed to have them, and he must learn not to behave like that."

"Oh, do let me manage him, John. Don't be too severe!" she pleaded.

But he gently pushed his wife aside, and taking the beads with considerable roughness from Ambrose, he laid them on the table, and then returned to the cot. The cries and screams were redoubled as the treasure was forfeited a second time.

"Give me a strap, nurse," said Lord Strode in a cold voice.

"Oh, don't punish him, John. He's still feeling strange. He will be a good boy now, won't you, Ambrose?"

"Be quick, nurse," said Lord Strode.

The strap was brought, and he administered a number of sharp blows upon the little hands; they evoked a fresh outburst of screams.

"That is enough, John . . . don't punish him any more," said Lady Strode entreatingly.

The last blow was an expression of his rising anger and fell with stinging force. Ambrose, who had never been whipped in his life, gave a shrill, despairing shriek. But he was conquered. The pain had cowed him into submission. He lay sobbing in his cot, his face buried in the pillows. His heart was beating violently with the pain and terror he felt; he panted like a wounded animal.

"Now you know what will happen to you, Ambrose, when you are a naughty boy," said Lord Strode.

He left the room with his wife. She was pale, too, and trembling.

"Oh, I'm so sorry you whipped him," she said; "he is so little, and I want him to learn to love us." . . .

"He won't love us any the less," said Lord Strode; "you can see he's quite undisciplined. It won't do him any harm and the sooner he learns to be obedient the better. I never saw such a little fury!"

When the nurse had gone down to her supper, and the room was almost in darkness, Ambrose, who was still sobbing fitfully, heard a little movement. Opening his eyes, he could just distinguish a small figure clad in blue pyjamas standing near him.

Robin's fair hair was tumbled, and his blue eyes were very bright.

"Rotten luck for you getting licked like that," he said, "especially the first day. But you asked for it, you know—yelling and screaming for those potty beads!"

He took one of the thin brown hands in his; it was still hot to the touch, and there were red weals where the blows had fallen.

Ambrose looked at him. The voice at least was kind, although he seemed to be condemning him for foolishness.

"Have you said your rosary to-night?" he asked.

"No—I haven't got one, and I shouldn't know how to say it. It's quite true what Aunt Eleanor said—we don't pray to them here."

"Does he beat you too?" He began to regard Robin as a companion in misfortune.

"Oh, no," said Robin. "You see, I am only here on a visit—and I've got a mother—she might kick up a fuss if he did!"

"Then why does he beat me?"

"Oh, well, you are his grandson—and he can't let you yell like that. You must learn to do what he tells you—then he'll always be decent to you!"

Robin was not seven yet, but he had been to a day school and could speak schoolboy slang with surprising ease.

"Shall I always be beaten here? Tibby never beat me." . . .

"Oh, no—you won't be licked if you do what you're told. But Uncle John is very strict. I advise you to try and please him. Good-night."

Ambrose put up two thin little arms and drew Robin's face down to his.

"I love you, Robin," he said simply.

"Oh, rot!" said Robin. "Still, I'm awfully sorry you got licked like that." He slipped away and climbed back into his own cot. But under the tranquilizing influence of this unexpected sympathy, Ambrose turned over and went quietly to sleep.

CHAPTER XXXII

So beads were wrong. So wrong and so wicked, that you were whipped if you cried for them; and then they were taken away and you never saw them again. You were a bad boy, and you were told to forget what Tibby had taught you. What would they say if they knew Tibby had told him to say Five Mysteries every day for his darling mother? The best plan would be to say the prayers in a whisper and count them carefully, as you hadn't got the beads any more. . . . No one would hear, and Tibby had never said it was Wrong.

Then he invented a plan by which the prayers might easily be counted. Five fingers on each hand—that when put together made a whole decade. The little fingers must fulfil the double purpose of the big beads, and the first and the last of the ten small beads. One must always remember to begin with the little fingers, and in this way you could say the rosary quite well, although the beads had been taken away and hidden from you. . . .

He did not ask for them again. But the small fingers served, and every night, when he was tucked up in his cot, he would hide his head under the bed-clothes and say the Five Sorrowful Mysteries for his mother who was now in Heaven,

and who perhaps had seen Our Lady and her Blessed Son. . . . And Lady Strode was quite satisfied that her husband's treatment had, after all, been wise, and that at such an early age it was easy to eradicate Error.

On Sunday he went to church with his grandparents and Robin. If the weather was fine they walked across the Park, as it was not very far. Church was a big bare building with rows and rows of pews covered with red cushions, and there were great red hassocks on which to put your feet. There was no priest in shining vestments, such as there had always been in Rome and in the dim Palermo days, but a very old man wearing a white surplice read some long prayers. Once during the service Lord Strode would emerge from his almost slumbering attitude in the pew, and go to the lectern and read the Second Lesson. Sometimes the people prayed aloud, but the prayers were quite unfamiliar except the Our Father, which was not even quite the same. There were no pictures nor statues nor crucifixes, but a number of slabs, brass or marble, hung on the walls, all of which seemed to bear this inscription at the top: *Sacred to the Memory*. . . . There was no Tabernacle on the Altar with beautiful white and gold curtains, and a red lamp burning and winking in front of it. Nor was there any holy-water stoup in which to dip your hand as you came in. The first time he went he genuflected before entering the pew, but Lord Strode pulled him quickly to his feet, saying: "Don't do that here!" And when Ambrose knelt down and crossed himself he said

again very sternly: "Never do that, Ambrose!" and his pale eyes flashed just as they had done when he struck him with the strap. So these things were Wrong too. He kept very still, kneeling when his grandparents knelt, sitting when they sat, standing when they stood. Twice during the service every one stood up and sang. Once the man in the white surplice got up into the pulpit and preached. Ambrose was deeply interested in the sermon. It was about the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes. But sometimes he got tired of listening to the sermon, which was generally very long, and he almost fell asleep. He was glad when every one rose to go. This time he did not attempt to genuflect, for no one else did, and perhaps it didn't matter so much, since there was no Tabernacle. Only he wished there had been a statue of Our Lady; he would have liked to see her again in her beautiful shining robe, and the crown of stars above her head, and the Divine Child in her arms. He wanted to beg her to take him under her robe, as she did the little dead children . . . since he had no mother now, and no Tibby to take care of him.

When the Easter holidays were over Robin went away. Ambrose missed him very much.

Once every month he went to church with nurse in the afternoon, instead of with his grandparents in the morning. There was a service for children, and all the children in the village were present. They sang a great many hymns. But there was never any mention of Our Lady, and Ambrose wondered why. He found courage

one day to whisper to a little girl who was sitting near him:

"Don't we ever say 'Hail, Mary'?"

She looked mystified.

"Don't we ever say what?"

"'Hail, Mary.' It is a prayer, you know."

"Never heard of it."

Ambrose was deeply perplexed. Later, he asked a bigger girl—she was so much older she would be sure to know.

"Oh, it's a prayer to the Virgin Mary, isn't it?" she said, slightly surprised. "We don't pray to her, but the Catholics do. I expect that's what you're thinking of!"

"Aren't you a Catholic?"

"No—I'm Protestant—Church of England, you know."

No one was "High Church" in Merrywood; the living was in Lord Strode's own gift, and he invariably chose men of sound and rather narrow Evangelical principles.

She added after a pause:

"It's awfully wicked to be a Catholic, and worship images and the Virgin Mary!"

He was beginning to understand. It was wrong and wicked, and that was why you were punished. Still, Tibby had not thought it wrong. He remembered her hurried, tearful words in St. Peter's, just before he had been taken away to England. He remembered his promise to her. And because there was no making the two outlooks agree, Ambrose compromised. He said his own old prayers regularly and secretly; he used his fingers instead of the

beads. But he risked no more punishment, and he did not tell even Robin of those secret beautiful prayers which he whispered nightly under the bed-clothes when he was supposed to be asleep.

Lady Strode had herself superintended the unpacking of his little trunk, prepared to confiscate anything that might savor of Rome. She came across a little faded photograph. It was the only one Miss Tibbit possessed of Yolande, and it had been taken long ago in Boulogne days when she still wore her hair falling like a dark cloud over her shoulders. It had gone to Tibby's heart to part with it, for it was very like her. She had looked almost as young the day she lay dead in Palermo. . . .

"Who is that?" said Lady Strode.

"That is Mama," said Ambrose. He kissed the picture and burst into sudden tears. "My darling Mama—she is in Heaven now. But Tibby said she thought the Madonna would protect me under her robe, just as if I were one of the little dead children she takes care of, because they have never been without their mothers before."

She was silent. He went on dreamily:

"I saw a statue of her once, and she wore a blue robe and she was gathering the little children under the shelter of it. And she wore a crown, and there were stars over her head." His eyes widened. "And Tibby said it was because she took such great care of the Infant Jesus when He was a baby and kept Him from feeling cold in the manger, and that is why He lets her take care of the little children when they die, because

they might be afraid of going alone . . . for the first time . . . into the dark without their mothers."

During this recital Lady Strode did not say a word. She listened attentively, and felt infinitely touched by the childish faith he displayed. "But dear," she said at last, "it is better not to talk about such things. We don't have statues of her here. And it might make your grandfather angry if he heard you talk like that."

"But you're not angry?" he said.

"No—I'm not angry, but I like you to try and please him."

Time doubtless would bestow alms for oblivion, and the old impressions would fade imperceptibly from his mind, atrophied from long disuse. There was nothing that even savored of Catholicism within many miles of Merrywood.

Ambrose's luggage revealed little. There was an Italian prayer-book with large print; there was a Garden of the Soul in English, and a Catechism also in English, all of which were immediately confiscated.

"English food will do a lot for him," said Lord Strode, "he is very small for his age and much too thin. They feed children absurdly abroad. Late dinners and wine—no wonder they are such puny little things! He must have porridge and milk puddings and lots of bread and butter. I don't suppose he's ever eaten a good slice of roast beef!"

He made this speech at dinner. He was excessively fastidious about his own food, and had

even sent his chef to Paris to be trained. Still the first sight of Ambrose had given him a strong sense of disappointment. The offending clothes—of poor Tibby's fashioning—had been thrown away, and a complete new outfit had been sent down from a big London shop. Ambrose looked very charming in his little soft silk shirts, and brown knee-breeches and stockings. His hair had been cut, though Lady Strode would not have it closely cropped as yet; she said it would make his face look too thin and pinched. But the food was a great trial to him. Though he enjoyed the bread and butter and fruit, he found the oatmeal porridge and milk puddings poor substitutes for the macaroni, spaghetti and delicious omelettes to which he had always been accustomed—even in their most frugal days—in Italy. He did his best to eat, and at first his nurse did not insist nor even scold too much when he failed.

He laid down his fork one day at luncheon. The slice of underdone beef, the unaccustomed cabbage, had filled him with a sense of nausea. He envied Robin, who was sitting opposite to him at the big nursery table, eating in great contentment. "Please . . . I can't eat this," he said politely. He did not wish to hurt any one's feelings. And Tibby had been strict about eating; she had not allowed him to leave anything on his plate.

"Eat it up, Master Ambrose," said Nurse, "you'll get nothing else till you've finished that. How will you ever grow up a big strong boy like Master Robin if you don't eat your dinner?"

He made another and more valiant attempt, but it was unavailing. At last she took his plate away, and placed in front of him a dry and rather milkless rice pudding.

"I think I cannot be hungry," he said, when this had shared the fate of the meat; "I would have liked very much a cup of *bouillon*. Often I had only that for my *déjeuner* with a dish of vegetables, perhaps, or some macaroni."

"But you're in England now—not in those horrid cut-throat foreign parts," said Nurse. "You must learn to eat what English boys do!"

Suet pudding was another severe trial; so, in its way, was boiled mutton. The change of food and climate made Ambrose look more ill and puny than before. It was very cold at Merrywood all through the month of May that year, but there was no fire in the nursery, nor in the rigorously ventilated night-nursery. Lord Strode believed in bringing up children, especially boys, to be hardy. He made no allowance for this child who from his cradle had been delicate, and who had lived always in a mild southern climate. He missed the sunshine which he had always known, and for which the comparative luxury of his present surroundings compensated ill. He learned to ride, and it pleased Lord Strode to find that he was not at all afraid. "But I have often ridden a mule," he explained with great gravity. The little Shetland pony seemed to him strangely small—almost a toy.

When Ambrose was seven years old he was taken to London to spend a few weeks. The big

house in Prince's Gate was not often inhabited, for both Lord Strode and his wife disliked town. But she had not been very well, and had to undergo a new electrical treatment, so they all left Merrywood and took up their abode in Prince's Gate towards the end of April. Ambrose liked London—the stir and movement of the traffic-crowded streets, the motors that were just then beginning to be fairly common sights, gliding incomprehensibly among the carriages and cabs and carts. He liked, too, the wonderful shops, bright, crowded, full of interesting things. Often he walked with his nurse down the Brompton Road, though, as a rule, he was taken into the Park. And one day, when they were passing a large gray building by the roadside, he caught a whiff of incense.

Few things bring back the past in the same vivid way as a particular perfume, whether of a flower or not. The incense carried Ambrose back to Italian days; he stopped short and looked wistfully up at the great building. An overpowering desire to enter it seized him. Dim as his memories were now becoming that faint perfume arrested him. And at that moment his nurse's attention was temporarily diverted to something passing in the street. He slipped away—he was always lithe as an eel—and fled up the wide and shallow steps into the church. It was very large—much bigger than the church at Merrywood—and it seemed very full of people. He went rapidly towards the altar, which was a blaze of light and dazzled his eyes. On one side he could see an altar of beautiful pale

marbles with a statue of Our Lady holding the Divine Child in her arms. He genuflected and knelt down upon a prie-dieu, bowing his head in his hands.

The white curtains of the Tabernacle were drawn back, and above the altar, surrounded by a ring of shining lights, was the gleaming monstrance with its Treasure. Looking up he saw the blurred clouds of acrid silver smoke issuing from the thurible; he heard the majestic chant of *O salutaris* and then of the *Tantum ergo*, sung by boys' voices of surpassing and thrilling sweetness. It struck a chord in his memory, linking the present with that remote past whose hold upon him was becoming ever more and more faint, in the web of forgotten vision. With a sob he hid his face in his hands.

The child's nature, starved and stunted, expanded under the influence of that sudden overwhelming grace. For the moment he felt as if he must die; his heart seemed incapable of absorbing so much joy. He was among friends. He was close to the Blessed Sacrament—so close that an infinite consolation seemed to touch him and raise him. He was again in that Divine Presence from which he had so long been exiled. Tibby's words came back to him. "*Place your whole trust and confidence in the Sacred Heart of Our Blessed Lord. Pray always to His Blessed Mother to keep you close to her Dear Son.*" Ambrose did not entirely lose consciousness, but after a few minutes he had no real cognizance of the people around him. Nor did he feel any more as if he were enclosed in the

four walls of a church. His childish soul, so curiously mature in many ways, was filled to overflowing with strange mystical joys. He was acutely aware of the ineffable nearness of the Divine. It was as if an overflowing cup had been put to his lips; he drank deeply. The frail quivering body remained there in an attitude of tense devotion. From that hour it would be impossible to think that he ever knew again that starvation, that aridity, which had been his portion. When he came back slowly to a consciousness of material things he was startled by the sharp ringing of a bell. The Host was uplifted, the Benediction was given; the Divine Praises were voiced by all present. People were beginning to get up and move away. Even now he was not alarmed at the thought of consequences. The lights upon the altar were being slowly extinguished, and it stood there cold and white in its marble splendor. The pale silken curtains once more hid the door of the Tabernacle—that Holy of Holies wherein the Divine Prisoner listened and consoled.

“I am a naughty boy,” he hid his face in his hands; “I have run away from Nurse. But please forgive me, dear Jesus. I did so want to see You again. And You have given me Your Blessing. Make me a good boy. And please let me see You again sometimes.” The words came to his lips like fragmentary ejaculations. Then raising his eyes he saw the figure of Our Lady watching him from among the pale marbles of the delicate old Italian altar. He prayed passionately:

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me. Take me under your robe as you do the little dead children. And I haven't forgotten my rosary, only they have taken my beads away, so I have to use my fingers instead." He repeated in a whisper the *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*. Yes, she loved little children and gathered them under her robe when they died lest they should feel afraid and alone, and thus she guided them into the Presence of her Son . . . because to her had been confided the care of the Christ Child when He lay little and helpless in the manger.

Ambrose sobbed with a strange emotion that seemed more akin to joy than pain. He forgot Nurse—forgot that he had run away and left her; he remembered only what old Tibby had taught him two years ago. And vaguely—so vaguely that it seemed only like a splendid dream—he seemed to recall the convent chapel where he had knelt with his mother, day after day, in Palermo. . . .

Suddenly he felt his arm seized, and looking up he saw his nurse's red and angry face.

She had been searching for him, never imagining that he had taken refuge in the church; her alarm and anxiety increased her anger as she dragged him to his feet with no gentle hand.

"Come away at once, Master Ambrose! You are a very naughty boy, and you shall go to bed the moment we get in. His lordship will be very angry with you—I shouldn't wonder if he punished you severely if he hears about it!"

She held his hand tightly; her grasp hurt him. He followed her meekly to the door, then he

broke free and with a sudden violent movement dashed towards the high stoup of holy water. Dipping his finger into it he crossed himself and genuflected. This was his last act of rebellion, and after that he went home quietly, and submitted to being put to bed, which seemed a special indignity, as it was broad daylight. His spiritual experiences faded a little; he was too young to grasp all of their marvelous significance; they seemed part of that exquisite dream that linked his present life to the rich and beautiful past which held his mother and Tibby.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE nurse was reticent on the subject when questioned by Lady Strode as to Ambrose's non-appearance in the drawing-room that evening. She was a little afraid of being dismissed for her lack of vigilance and her inability to control her charge. Nor had she forgotten the episode of the beads when Ambrose first came to Merrywood.

"I put Master Ambrose to bed, my lady, because he was naughty while he was out to-day," she said, in reply to Lady Strode's questioning.

"I am sorry to hear that," said Lady Strode; "you must tell him that I am very sorry, and that I shall not come and say good-night to him."

This message, duly delivered, was received with some sense of relief by the delinquent.

"Did you say what I'd done?" he asked.

"I told her ladyship you had been naughty," she said evasively; "lie down and go to sleep now, Master Ambrose."

But on the following day a lady who was calling, and who knew the child by sight, inadvertently disclosed the truth.

"I saw your dear little grandson in the Oratory yesterday afternoon," she said.

"In the Oratory?" echoed Lady Strode, almost dropping her cup in an amazement which

was not untouched with indignation. "Oh, you must have been mistaken—it couldn't have been Ambrose! We never permit him to go there! You see, as a tiny child he was always abroad, and he picked up so many very deplorable ideas. But he has quite forgotten them now, only we have been very particular to keep him away from any contaminating influence. We have had him for nearly two years, and he has never heard anything of the kind even mentioned. His nurse has very strict orders about it."

She spoke with great assurance, nevertheless a strange misgiving filled her heart. She remembered that he had been put to bed early last night for some unknown act of naughtiness during his afternoon walk, and she had not inquired into the precise nature of his misdemeanor.

"Well, I must have been mistaken then. Only I certainly thought I saw him," said her visitor. "He is such a very uncommon-looking child, with those enormous black eyes. He was kneeling near Our Lady's altar, and my friend who was with me said what a very devout child he was!"

"I must ask nurse about it," said Lady Strode, "but I feel sure that she would not have permitted anything of the kind. He was alone, did you say?"

"Yes—quite alone—and he was still there when we left."

Later, when her visitor had departed, she went up to the nursery. Ambrose was sitting at the table playing absently with a fort and some soldiers. He never cared greatly for toys, but he

was not allowed to read much as yet, although he could now do so with ease.

He slipped down from his high-chair, and, going up to her, kissed her dutifully.

"I hope you have been a good boy to-day, Ambrose," she said; "I was very sorry to hear you had to be punished yesterday."

"I have tried to be good to-day, Grannie," he said, flushing.

"And I hope you have told Nurse that you were sorry you were naughty yesterday."

"No," said Ambrose.

"Then you should have done so."

"But I was glad," said the child; "glad that I runned away from her!"

"Glad? Oh, you mustn't talk like that, Ambrose! Where did you run to?"

"Into a big, big church. A lovely church." . . . His eyes were wide at the remembrance. But the confession made his heart thump.

Lady Strode turned sharply to the nurse.

"What church?" she asked.

"I think they call it the Oratory, my lady," she said, turning very red.

"It was very wrong of you, Ambrose. You mustn't come down to-night. You shall not be allowed to come down into the drawing-room for a whole week." She rose in anger. So it was true. In spite of all their precautions this child of seven had outwitted them. Was it possible that he still remembered?

"You will have to take better care of him than this," she said to the nurse in a tone of ice, "or I shall have to find some one more trustworthy."

"Where's Ambrose?" inquired Lord Strode.

He came into the drawing-room about seven o'clock. He was dining out early and going to a new play. As a rule, he found a moment to come in and see his grandson.

"He's not coming downstairs to-night," said Lady Strode. "I forbade it. He wasn't very good yesterday."

"What has he been doing?" asked Lord Strode, indifferently.

"Oh, he ran away from nurse," she said, trying to speak lightly. She did not wish to tell him the exact truth, for she considered that Ambrose had been sufficiently punished for yesterday's escapade.

"Ran away? Do you mean to say she lost him? My dear Eleanor, you had better dismiss her at once! It is most unpardonable! Where on earth did the boy get to?"

"He . . . went into the Oratory" . . . said Lady Strode reluctantly. "But please don't be angry with him, John. I don't suppose he understood it was a Catholic church. Mrs. Steele saw him there. I think he has been punished quite enough—he was put to bed when he came in yesterday, and I am not going to let him come down and play here for a week."

Lord Strode's face was hard and set.

"My dear, do you suppose he will care for those baby punishments? I really can't overlook this."

He moved towards the door. She tried to stop him.

"Oh, John—please don't hurt him! He really doesn't understand."

"My dear, we can't tell how much he remembers. I must put a stop to it, once for all. We mustn't run any risks!"

He went up into the nursery. Ambrose felt half afraid when he saw his grandfather approach. He was always a little afraid of him, of his mocking ridicule as well as of his anger.

Sending the nurse out of the room he said coldly:

"Come here, Ambrose."

The child approached him, trembling.

"You were very naughty yesterday, I hear. I am going to punish you."

Ambrose felt suddenly frightfully alone and small and helpless. His grandfather looked so tall, so powerful, so angry. In the big nursery there was a strange and awful silence.

Ambrose's face was very white. He felt sure now that he was going to be whipped. Both were perhaps thinking of the incident of the rosary.

"I am going to whip you," said Lord Strode.

He seized the trembling little figure. The blows fell sharply. Once Ambrose screamed. At last, after a long time, he felt himself released; he heard his grandfather say, as if from a long way off: "Now go straight to bed."

Once more he was left alone. He undressed and crept into bed, lying there quite motionless. And as in the past there remained in his mind a confusion of ideas. He had often been naughty

and disobedient, and his nurse had put him to bed and no worse had ensued. What was there then in this last exploit which had aroused his grandfather's anger—that terrible cold anger which he feared so greatly?

Outside it was growing quite dark. The house was hushed into silence. Presently he slipped out of bed and went to the window. It was raining, and the pavements gleamed like dark rivers in the lamplight. His heart, as well as his body, was sore with those harsh blows. He cried a little silently. And as he crouched there the door opened, and Lady Strode came into the room. She pulled a chair near the window, and, sitting down, drew him into her arms. She wanted to comfort him. She felt that he had been too severely punished. The scene had taken her back to Gifford's childhood.

"My dear Ambrose—I'm so sorry," she said.

"Oh, it doesn't matter, Grannie," he said, choking back the tears.

He looked up with large solemn eyes.

"I've been beaten," he said simply; "I wish he would tell me why."

She started a little. "Why, for running away from nurse. For being naughty and disobedient yesterday."

"Only that?" he asked a little curiously.

"But, my dear, what other reason should there be? You must learn to be obedient, Ambrose, and then no one will punish you."

"But I wanted to be there—in that church," he said, a little mystified.

"You must only go to church when somebody

takes you. And, you know, I have had to scold you for being naughty and restless in church at Merrywood."

"But that was different," he said, still puzzled. Either she was purposely miscomprehending him or she did not understand. He wished that she could understand.

"I'm always sorry when you have to be punished," she said. "You must try and be more like Robin."

She took him on her knee.

"You won't do it again, will you, dear? You see, it makes your grandfather very angry. Now you must go back to bed. I am sure you are very sorry." . . .

Was he sorry? He was not quite sure. He had been so happy yesterday that even to-day's punishment had seemed almost worth while. Still, it had held dark, terrifying moments of sharp pain. He went back quietly to bed and lay awake for a long time. It was only when he began to pray that the relief of tears came. The Five Sorrowful Mysteries were long in the saying that night. But when he fell asleep he dreamed of Our Lady watching him tenderly, and beckoning to him to join the little dead children under her robe. . . .

From that day Ambrose led two lives. One, visible, submissive, obedient, and the other interior and full of spiritual struggles and a nostalgia that became at times almost insupportable. He had no guidance in that other life. Through that spiritual land he moved alone; they might

and did prevent his body trespassing upon forbidden territory, but they had no means of restraining the soul's swift and untrammelled flight. Of hidden sweetness he knew much, and it illuminated his countenance so that even strangers were struck by the child's eager, shining face with its curious look of mature intelligence.

The nurse was dismissed and another and older one came to take charge of him. He was almost immediately sent back to Merrywood in her care, and he remained there while his grandparents stayed on in town. During those early years he displayed always a sweet docility; his disposition, though not sunny like Robin's, showed an equable gravity; but no one guessed that he was consciously going through a time of probation that almost killed him with longing. He prayed for some one to come—some one who should speak that beautiful, remembered language; some one to whom he could make known that other hidden self. But no one came. He was to work his own way up in silence and suspense.

For five years after that episode of the Oration Ambrose scarcely left Merrywood, except for an annual visit to some quiet seaside resort, where he had no other playmate but Robin Lumleigh. Tutors succeeded governesses, even as governesses had succeeded nurses; but when he was nearly twelve the question of sending him to school was seriously discussed. Under any other circumstances he would have gone to school, as his father had done, at the age of eight. But this

was considered inexpedient. Now, however, he was sent to a preparatory school on the south coast, where Rex and Gifford had both been educated—an old-established place, where only a comparatively small number of boys were received. Lord Strode ascertained that there were no Catholic boys there to awaken those now long dormant memories. Ambrose was not particularly happy at school. His loneliness seemed still to wrap him round and separate him from his companions. Robin was there during his first term and then left to go to Eton. Robin was the head of the school and a very important and popular personage; he had not a great deal of time for befriending his cousin; still, he was kind to him whenever opportunity occurred. After he had left Ambrose formed one or two friendships, but they were never intimate ones. The other Self made a barrier between him and the rest of the world. One of the masters, a Mr. Standish, was kind to the boy. Ambrose was in his form; he liked him very much—perhaps better than any one else in the school. He had a feeling that if he could ever confide in any one it would be this man. Standish was about twenty-four; he had not long left Oxford; he was big and strong and keen about games. But he went away very suddenly in the middle of Ambrose's third term, and his unexpected departure caused a good deal of not unnatural curiosity among the boys. Some said that he had had a row with the Head, others that he had been taken suddenly ill, but no one seemed to know the real reason.

"Why's Standish gone?" Ambrose asked a boy called Bertram, who had also been in the same form.

"It's a secret, you know" . . . said Bertram; "no one's supposed to know. But he told me."

Ambrose had a scrupulous sense of honor.

"Then if it's a secret you can't tell me," he said.

"I don't believe he'd mind your knowing," said Bertram; "you see, you were a bit of a pal of his. Only old Collins didn't want all the school to know. He went away because he wants to become a Catholic, and he told me that perhaps later he should try and be a Catholic priest!"

Ambrose gave an exclamation of surprise. "A priest?" he said. "A Catholic priest! Oh, I wish he had told me—I wish he had told me!"

"Why, what difference could it make to you?" said Bertram. "Of course, old Collins couldn't let him stop here after that. Some of the boys' parents might object."

He sauntered away and Ambrose was filled with a sudden almost passionate jealousy of Bertram to whom Mr. Standish had confided his great secret. And it had mattered so little to Bertram, whereas it would have made all the difference in the world to Ambrose! This one who could have spoken his language and answered his questions and *understood*—just as his mother and Tibby had understood—and who could have told him so many things which he desired most passionately to know—had gone out of his life, and passing had made no sign.

But the real truth of the matter had been re-

vealed in that interview between the Head and Cyril Standish, a day or two before the latter's departure.

"I think it only right to tell you, sir, that I have definitely made up my mind to place myself under instruction with the intention of becoming a Catholic. Perhaps under the circumstances you would prefer that I should leave you?"

Cyril Standish had a very quiet way of speaking, but it often gave additional significance to his words.

Mr. Collins turned quite abruptly, as if he could hardly believe his ears.

"Why, my dear Standish—this is very sudden! A Catholic? Dear me—that's a very serious step to take, and one which I'm afraid you will find will militate very seriously against your future prospects as a schoolmaster. The Catholics keep the education of their children so very much in the hands of religious orders—there's hardly such a thing as a private lay school for boys. Of course, I've always known, and yes, I may say I've deplored, your very extreme views, but they are not uncommon in the Church of England to-day, and we must move with the times . . . move with the times, and all that sort of thing! But a Catholic—yes, that's another pair of shoes . . . yes, yes, I'm afraid I could hardly keep you here under the circumstances. It would do a lot of harm to the school if it got about, and boys have such a way of finding out things. Lord Strode would certainly take his grandson, young Lumleigh, away—and, by the way, I'd rather you didn't mention it to Lumleigh. They are

very particular about him, because I understand his mother was a Catholic, and he was brought up as one till he was five years old, and no Catholic can inherit the family money and property, so it's important to keep this boy quite apart from—ahem!—any influence of the kind. Yes, I'm afraid I shall have to part with you, Standish. I suppose you've quite made up your mind? You wouldn't like to have a good talk with Mr. Charlton first? He is an excellent Churchman and a thorough theologian—perhaps you are aware he is the author of that very able and convincing—I might say admirable—little work, 'The Case against Rome in a Nutshell'? Disposes in a quite wonderful way of the Petrine claim, and simply makes mincemeat of the dogma of Papal Infallibility. I'm sure he would help you in your difficulties."

"I am not in any difficulties, thank you, sir," said Standish; "my way is quite clear. But I see that I cannot remain where I am, and I do not wish to delay taking the step. It is very kind of you to think of my future prospects, but I hope to become a priest."

The Head was now genuinely shocked.

"A priest?" he repeated. "Oh, I should not take any rash steps of that kind just yet, Standish. You are still young—you don't know what you're letting yourself in for. Mr. Charlton—a really broad-minded man—quite sympathetic with dissenters—would, I feel sure, be of great assistance. Let me write to him."

"No, thank you, sir."

"But a priest" . . . expostulated the Head.

Again that slow, unwilling smile.

"I may not be found worthy, sir." . . .

When he had gone the Head pondered disconsolately over this strange and even eccentric young man.

"Some one has been getting hold of him—a Jesuit, most likely—and yet I should have thought Standish a singularly level-headed chap," he said to himself. "It's a great loss to the school, but, of course, I can't keep him after that. Especially with young Lumleigh here."

The instructions of Lord Strode, when he first placed Ambrose in Mr. Collins's keeping, had been extremely explicit. Of course, there was very little danger now—so many years had passed since the boy had come in direct contact with the Errors of Rome; but one could not be too careful, and one never knew how far the Jesuits would keep their eye on a case of the kind. "But I think I thrashed all that nonsense out of him when he first came to us as quite a little chap," added Lord Strode complacently, "and I'm glad to say he seems to have forgotten it all now!"

With such a grandparent in the immediate background it was incumbent upon Mr. Collins, who stated in his prospectus that he prepared the Sons of Noblemen for Eton, Harrow, and Winchester, to be more than usually careful.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AMBROSE never quite forgot the sickening sense of disappointment he experienced when he first heard the reason of Cyril Standish's departure. It seemed to him almost as if God had forgotten him, since help should have been so near, and he had not known it. Here had been his chance, and in his ignorance he had allowed it to slip by. Was there then no sign by which he could discern those who could help him? Was it to punish him that he had been kept so blind with his eyes sealed? Once, some weeks later, he plucked up courage to say to Bertram:

"I suppose you have not heard from Standish?"

"No—he isn't allowed to write to the boys. Rotten shame, isn't it? But I mean to write to him next holidays. It's a swindle his being sent off like that as if he'd done something wrong!"

Bertram, however, never received any reply from Cyril Standish to that letter written in the holidays. It reached him when he was already in Rome. But he never forgot Ambrose Lumleigh in his prayers. He had had a strange notion that the boy was tormented with some obscure interior spiritual difficulty, and he had often wished it were possible to break down the barriers and question him. But something had always held

him back. He feared to think of what he might find and awaken—perhaps something that he could not deal with alone. His own struggles and loneliness at that time made him singularly alive to the existence of spiritual difficulties in others. Perhaps some day he would come across him again in the freedom of the great world, apart from the restrictions and limitations of school life.

Ambrose worked less well than usual for the rest of that term. He did not get his remove, which displeased his grandfather. He showed an increased apathy at games. The Head, who had an astute and vigilant eye, marked this falling-off with some dismay. For the first time Ambrose had a very indifferent report. There was a lack of energy, of enthusiasm; an apathy and indolence which displayed itself alike in the class-room and in the playing-field.

“You’ve got a nice report this time, Ambrose,” said Lord Strode. “Just listen to this!” And with savage sarcasm he read out some of the more damaging statements.

Ambrose flushed. He felt deeply humiliated. Moreover, it was all quite true. Mr. Standish’s departure had disheartened him, and he had felt too discouraged to work, and had not liked his new form master.

“I know—I am very sorry,” he said dispiritedly.

“Don’t roll your r’s like that. I wish you would learn to speak English.” This was an old source of offense.

“Well, if you won’t work at school I shall take

you away," said Lord Strode presently, "and you shall have a tutor at home. I'll see that you work then. You shall have one more chance."

Ambrose did better the following term and remained at school for another year. Then he went to Eton, where he found Robin, and the two became great friends. Of late they had not seen much of each other, as during the holidays Robin had nearly always accompanied his mother abroad. She was much more delicate than she used to be, and had grown fanciful about her health. It amused Robin to go abroad with her. He was very much grown, and stood nearly six feet in height. He was a very strong, very handsome boy. Ambrose looked extremely small in comparison. His height was a great disappointment to his grandfather, whose own two sons had been very tall. Ambrose was small for fourteen, and thin and rather delicate-looking. Only once during his time at Eton did he come into collision with Lord Strode. This was on the subject of his confirmation. His tutor had written to ask if his grandfather wished him to be prepared for it. The subject was broached almost on the day Ambrose returned to Merrywood for the holidays. Not for many years had Ambrose's two lives been in such fierce conflict.

"I hope," said Lord Strode, "that you will attend very seriously to the matter. It is a very important occasion. Your dear father underwent a great change at the time of his confirmation."

What did the boy's silence mean? There was something almost dogged and sullen about it.

"I cannot be confirmed. . . . I am very sorry." . . .

"You will be confirmed whether you wish it or not," said Lord Strode; "we have attended most particularly all these years to your religious education. You must show us now that you are not without appreciation of all that has been done for you. Your grandmother and I both wish it." His steel-like eyes flashed.

Still the boy was silent; setting his lips. Never through all those years—years in which he had been arbitrarily separated from everything to do with his own religion—had he failed to say the Five Mysteries of the Rosary on his fingers when he went to bed at night. Thus he had not forgotten the prayers which Tibby had taught him—the prayers he had learned at his mother's knee.

"Well—what have you got to say?"

"Only that it is impossible."

"Impossible?" Lord Strode frowned.

"I mean . . . I couldn't be. It isn't that I'm not grateful for all you have done for me."

"I must get Marston to give him a good talking to," said Lord Strode, when he had dismissed him with a few sharp and angry words.

Mr. Marston was the Vicar of Merrywood, a rather muscular and sporting Christian with sound Evangelical views. Ambrose was sent down to the Vicarage one morning, rather dreading the interview but quite resolute. Mr. Marston received him in his study, very cheery, hearty, and sympathetic, and full of sound common sense.

"Well, Ambrose, my dear boy, I'm delighted to see you. Getting on well at Eton, I hope? And how is Robin? Well, what's all this about? You're shirking confirmation, his lordship tells me? Well, well, there is no great harm in that—boys often do. . . . But you've no doubts of the faith, I hope?"

"None at all," said Ambrose.

"Perhaps you think you're not good enough? Well—we ought to be humble before Almighty God. Very praise-worthy scruple, if that's your difficulty. But you mustn't let it lead you into displeasing your grandfather, to whom you owe so much."

"That has nothing to do with my reason, Mr. Marston," said Ambrose; "but I don't wish to be confirmed. I have reasons, but I cannot tell them to any one."

"Well, I shouldn't decide too quickly if I were you. Think it over and pray," he added heartily. He shook the boy's hand. Ambrose felt himself dismissed.

He was in disgrace, in consequence, all through the summer holidays. He had refused confirmation so definitely that nothing could be done with him. Even Robin was unsympathetic when he came down to stay for a few days before starting for Aix-les-Bains with his mother.

"I've been confirmed," he said; "there's nothing to make a fuss about. Besides, every one is. And your hanging back like this is only annoying Uncle John. You'd much better give in."

Ambrose flushed.

"If I could I'd do it to please him," he said obstinately, "but I simply can't, Robin."

So he was in disgrace that summer. The second self became again a very vivid and real thing to him, but it was a substantial barrier between himself and his grandparents. He did not go to the seaside, and towards the end of August he fell suddenly ill. Before long the malady was diagnosed as typhoid fever. Like many old houses, Merrywood had not had its drains overhauled for a great many years. Two nurses came from London. Lord Strode took alarm. Ambrose was forgiven, but this signified little to one tossing in high fever and muttering deliriously.

Lady Strode was almost beside herself with this new anxiety. She believed that this boy was going to die—as her own sons had died. There seemed to be a curse on the old house. She accused herself of never having been sufficiently kind to him. In spite of all her resolutions she had never found courage to stand between him and her husband's anger. They had always been too severe in their treatment of him. He had known so little real sympathy and kindness since he came to them. Once when she stole into the room to look at him, she found him moving his thin fingers in swift rotation, and uttering Latin words.

"Ave Maria—gratia plena. . . . Dominus tecum" . . .

"What is he saying, nurse?"

"I think he is praying, my lady. He seems to be trying to say the rosary on his fingers."

"Oh, no," she said, "you must be mistaken. He has never had a rosary since he first came to us! He is a Protestant!"

"He must have heard it somewhere," said the nurse, carelessly; "I am a Catholic myself, and I thought he was one!"

Lady Strode was shocked at this information.

"Oh, I am sorry to hear that," she said; "we don't have any Catholics here—it isn't allowed. I am afraid we shall have to ask you to go directly you can be replaced."

Nurse O'Mara was an Irishwoman. She had taken a fancy to her patient, and wished that she could have stayed at Merrywood to help pull him through. She was on night duty, and it was impossible to replace her until the next day, so she was left alone with him that night.

"I hope he will sleep," thought Lady Strode, "and he is too ill to learn anything from her now!"

When the gray light of dawn crept into the room Ambrose opened his eyes. Near the bed sat the nurse in her blue print dress, with her white apron and neat Sister Dora cap. Her lips were moving and so were her fingers; a faint chink sounded. Ambrose flung out his thin, burning hand.

"What are you doing?" he cried excitedly.

"Hush, Mr. Lumleigh. I was only saying my prayers."

"But *what* prayers? What have you got in your hand?"

She held up the rosary—a strong one with beads of black onyx and a silver crucifix and

medal. He snatched it from her, and pressing the crucifix to his lips burst into a passion of tears.

She was astonished and alarmed.

"Oh, Mr. Lumleigh—you mustn't excite yourself. You must keep very quiet, and try and go to sleep."

"Let me hold it," he pleaded; "please don't take it away. I'll lie as still as possible if you'll only let me have it. Let me say the Sorrowful Mysteries just once . . . it will help me to go to sleep."

"Just once, then," she said gently. She knew the power of those prayers to soothe and calm. Long before he had finished a single decade the boy lay quiet in a beautiful sleep.

He held the rosary tightly clenched in his fingers; she dared not risk disturbing him by trying to take it away. But his strange words filled her thoughts. They had said he was not a Catholic, but somewhere, at some time, he must have learned Catholic prayers and devotions. Here was a mystery—a mystery that she would never be able to solve since she was not acceptable at Merrywood on account of her religion.

In the morning when he awoke she was no longer there. In his sleep the rosary must have dropped from his hand; it was not there, she had perhaps taken it away. It could not have been a dream that he had held the precious thing in his hands, and had fallen asleep while he was still saying the first of the Five Sorrowful Mysteries.

Another nurse was sitting beside him.

"Where is nurse?" he said. "The one who was here last night?"

"I don't know, Mr. Lumleigh. Your grandmother fetched her away just now."

"She hasn't gone?" he asked.

"I really don't know."

"I hope she will come back soon," said Ambrose, "I liked her—she was very kind."

The day wore slowly on, but she did not return. Ambrose fretted silently. He had thought of innumerable questions that he wished to ask her. She had come and gone like a vision, bearing her precious treasure with her. And, as with Mr. Standish, the boy felt frustrated. Help had been so near; this time he had known it, had recognized it . . . and let it slip past him. He turned his face to the wall and shed scalding tears.

"A relapse," said the doctor, finger on pulse.

He looked grave. Lady Strode felt her heart sinking like a lump of lead. She had lost two sons, and she had learned to love this boy who had always been so aloof, so reserved, so unknowable.

"Where's Nurse O'Mara?"

"She has gone back to town," whispered Lord Strode in reply. "We only discovered yesterday that she was a Catholic. I object very strongly to having Catholics in the house."

"It's a pity you got rid of her. She was a very good nurse—understood the case well. He got on well while she was here."

"There are other nurses," he said.

"If you had asked my advice," said the doctor, "I should have warned you of the danger of changing at such a critical time."

"Danger?" Lady Strode caught at the word. Ambrose lay there, fever-flushed, muttering, moving his thin fingers.

"He is worse, of course—his temperature is very high."

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Has he anything on his mind?"

"Not that I know of. He's really a very good boy."

"Nothing troubling him?"

"A boy of fourteen who has been cared for and guarded always?" Lord Strode almost scoffed at the idea.

Gifford's boy. . . . Yes, but he was also Yolande's boy. And the grandson of the woman who, dying in the far-off Indian hill-station, had cried out to her husband to safeguard the religion of their little girl. . . .

The dead hand seemed to stretch across the twin gulfs of time and space. Thirty-three years ago. . . . Such a strong hand in death that had been in life so small, so frail, so clinging. . . . The hand that still held Ambrose in a grip of iron. Stronger than environment, stronger than education, stronger than all their efforts to conquer it. . . .

During the day the great London specialist came down to see the heir and hope of the Strodes. The players of the trivial drama waited in grim suspense. Lady Strode felt that neither of her

two former experiences had held such a load of anguish. The boy was very dear to her; dearer, perhaps, than her own sons had been; there was a tenderness, a docility, in his disposition, at once so tranquil and so grave, which they had completely lacked. If she had not interfered when he had been subjected to harsh and severe treatment, it was because she honestly believed that it had been necessary. There were things that had to be eradicated from the boy's mind. She had dreaded lest those sharp measures should have the effect of making Ambrose hate them. But looking back she was aware always of a sweetness, a patience, a docility, an absence of all rebellion and bitter thought. And was it true that nothing had been of any avail? For the first time she envisaged the fact that Ambrose had not forgotten, that he still remembered. She had been afraid, she had suspected, and she had not dared speak nor question him. She had been aware, too, that the boy had been dominated by strange and exotic influences that disciplined and controlled him—things that were quite outside his daily life. Yes—he was Yolande's son—the child of the woman whom Gifford had loved and deceived, and loved until the end of his life. That was why he could never be the child of Merrywood tradition. She bent over him yearningly. "Ambrose . . . Ambrose . . ." She felt that her heart was breaking.

He put out his arms. . . . "Mama. . . . Mama . . ." he said.

And thus he floated into unconsciousness. . . .

For three days and nights they fought at

Merrywood for the life of the heir. At the end of that time Ambrose's spirit fluttered back to earth—as it seemed to those anxious watchers—took possession with renewed vigor of its slender prison-house of clay, insisting, as youth will, upon its inherent right to live. A prolonged struggle, a fierce fight, a victory without triumph, broken-winged and inglorious . . . yet with the hosts of death scattered in confusion.

He spoke only once on the night after the supreme crisis. It was to Lady Strode, who, spent and weary, had never left him.

"I knew I was very ill, perhaps dying," he said; "I saw it in your faces. But I didn't want to die . . . like this." . . .

Like what? . . . She did not dare question him. But she bent down and kissed him. "Darling Ambrose," she said; "my darling boy." . . .

He could feel her tears falling on his face.

CHAPTER XXXV

LORD STRODE sat in his study over the fire. He had come in from a long day's hunting, and for the first time Ambrose had accompanied him. It had been considered inexpedient to send the boy back to Eton that term, the doctors having advised a complete rest from all brain work until his strength was completely restored.

Ambrose had been the recipient of a good deal of attention, and he rode so well that even his grandfather had been proud of him. His was such a vivid little face, and the exercise had brought a tinge of color to the thin, rather sallow cheeks. A small valiant figure he was perched upon one of his grandfather's hunters, and many people regarded with curiosity this boy-heir to the house of Strode. Not so many years ago—for time slips past quickly in the even monotony of country days—this boy's father and uncle had been the most discussed young men in the county. And it was of his father that people thought to-day—of Gifford, with his April moods of careless gaiety and sudden, somber gloom. If his first marriage had been sordid, his second—at least all that was known of it—had been decidedly romantic. Very little was known of this other wife who had lived abroad and had died abroad, and had never come to

Merrywood, and whose son had been brought thither only when both his parents were dead.

With this mysterious episode in the background—for a fierce illumination beats always upon the seats of the locally mighty in every county—Ambrose could scarcely escape being an object of very special interest when he first rode to the meet with Lord Strode. He was not at all like his father's family in appearance, and so it was decided that he must resemble his mother, especially as he had such a foreign look. They were not aware that beyond her name Yolande had had nothing of the foreigner about her, and that no blood other than English ran in her veins.

Kathleen Chenevix took special notice of Ambrose, whom she had had a sentimental curiosity to see. She had not expected this grave, self-possessed, well-mannered boy, who spoke English with a strong touch of foreign accent. He had none of Gifford's sunny charm and unsuspected variability. He was unchildlike—she had heard that much about him,—and evidently the very repressive atmosphere of Merrywood had deepened his disposition to reticence. She wished to talk to him, and to learn something of his mother—that unknown, mysterious woman to whom even Gifford Lumleigh had been supremely faithful.

"You've never been out with us before," she said to him, with her fresh, frank smile.

"No—my grandfather didn't wish it. But I couldn't go back to Eton this half, and I've been told to be out a lot in the open air."

"Oh, yes—I remember, you were very ill in the summer. Are you better now?"

"Yes—I'm quite well again, thank you."

She said: "They do keep you under lock and key. It must be awfully dull for you."

"Not when Robin is there," he said.

"I was a friend of your father's," said Cat, hesitating a little over the word "friend." "I liked him very much. But you don't remember him, do you?"

"No—I don't remember him. I hadn't seen him since I was two."

"You remember your mother, of course?"

"Oh, yes," he said; "I remember her quite well, and the place where we lived in Palermo. The palms and the climbing roses." . . .

"Do you remember what she was like? Dark or fair?"

"She was dark," said Ambrose, "and beautiful." . . . His eyes shone.

"But you were very little when you came here."

"I was five years old. I can remember quite well. I can remember Tibby, too."

"Tibby? Who on earth is Tibby?"

"She was old," said Ambrose; "I think she was my mother's governess. She used to teach me."

"Till you came here?"

"Yes—after my mother died—till I came here."

"They didn't let her come too?"

"Oh, no," said Ambrose; "I came with my grandmother. She fetched me. I was in Rome with Tibby."

He could still remember that terrible journey, the dark, swift, desolate rushing across strange and unknown countries, when he lay awake and sobbed in his narrow *wagon-lit*. He could still remember Lady Strode's vain efforts to comfort him. He had only wanted Tibby, and they had left Tibby, weeping bitterly, behind. While the rest of those childish days had become blurred and dim, except for some stray memory of his mother, those events still stood out quite sharply.

"Your mother never came to Merrywood," said Cat, wondering a little how far it was wise to discuss the situation with the boy.

"No, never," he said; "we lived abroad always. There was sunshine—it was never too cold." He shivered a little, for the November air was sharp.

"But you're happy here?"

This time he did not answer; he looked straight in front of him, as if he were insensible of her presence. Memory, so treacherous and elusive, was trying to paint the South anew for him—the blue shining sea, the green shining palms, the groves of orange-trees, the strong and sweet perfumes, the fireflies that lit their lamps at night and wandered like jeweled vagrants in the garden, and, above all, a mountain that could be seen across the harbor—long, and high, and flat-topped, dimly purple against a fierce blue sky. . . .

"What are you thinking of?" she asked gently.

There had been at that moment to her thinking a faint resemblance to Gifford, in some of his sadder moods, about the boy's eyes and mouth.

"I was thinking of all that time." He spoke

gravely. "Some day I shall perhaps go back to it. I have to learn now, and go to school and play games and hunt, and be like other boys. But when I am a man I shall go back. It is all waiting for me." . . . He seemed to be speaking less to her than to himself.

"What a strange boy you are, Ambrose!" she said. "Isn't England enough for you?"

He said slowly: "I don't belong here. I wish I did. They are trying to make me and then I disappoint them. . . . When I am a man I shall be free!"

"What does Lord Strode think of these ideas?"

"He does not know I have them. I never speak of them. But you asked me—you made me speak. I think if he knew he would be very angry."

"And he's awful when he's angry?"

"Yes—I am afraid of him."

"He used to be harsh, too, to your father and punish him severely when he was a boy."

"He punishes me too," said Ambrose. "He doesn't wish to be unkind. He only wants me to think as he thinks. It is not easy to please him."

"Your father didn't always try and please him," said Cat.

"Tell me about my father. What was he like?"

"He was tall and very good-looking, with dark gray eyes. He had rather fair curly hair. He always looked like a boy—young and careless," said Cat. "Didn't your mother tell you?"

"I can't remember my mother or Tibby ever speaking of him," said Ambrose. "I used to think he was dead—long before he died. He didn't live with us, you see—I don't know why. No one has ever told me."

Cat knew why perfectly well, but she was not prepared to enlighten him on the point. Some day his grandparents would probably tell him as much as they knew themselves, which from all accounts amounted to very little.

The boy went on speaking:

"I should like to see dear old Tibby again. I wish, though, I didn't remember her best of all. I should like to remember my mother best!"

As he rode home that afternoon in the gray clear twilight of the November day, Lord Strode said to him.

"You were talking for a long time to Lady Kathleen Chenevix at the meet this morning. What had she got to say?"

"She talked—a little about my father," said Ambrose hesitatingly.

He was tired and cold, and the day had not been at all an exciting one. Since the morning they had not had a single good gallop. But he had liked Lady Kathleen, and her conversation had interested him. She was a woman whom most boys would like for her cheerful buoyant spirits, her easy *camaraderie* and her ready sympathy. Her own son was a few years younger than Ambrose, and she was very devoted to him. Gifford had been the one love of her life, and though she was not at all morbid about him, she

could not help feeling a very deep interest in the personality of his boy. Ambrose had wanted to talk to her a great deal more; he felt that she could have explained a number of things which he very much wished to know. She might have told him, for instance, why his mother had never been to Merrywood, and why his father had not lived with them up till the time of his death. And he would have liked to talk to her, too, for she was bright and sympathetic. Only he had been a little afraid. She might not understand, and she might repeat it. It was safer locked up in his own heart, and he trembled when he thought how near he had been to telling her of that strange second life, which was so much nearer and more intimate than his outward everyday life of school and games and hunting, and being ill, and have to be punished, and the rest of the trivial things which made it material and solid.

"She was always a gossip," said Lord Strode. "What did she tell you about him?"

"She said he was tall and fair and handsome and very boyish-looking," he said.

They rode in silence through the muddy lanes. Their horses, too, were tired. Presently Lord Strode said:

"Did she talk about your mother, Ambrose?"

"She asked me if I remembered her."

"And you said . . .?"

"That I remembered her and . . ." he hesitated.

"And . . .?" prompted Lord Strode.

"And Tibby," said Ambrose.

"Children always believe that they can remember their old nurses," said Lord Strode, with a touch of scorn. "She was a terrible old woman, Ambrose. You would do well to forget her."

The old uneasy feeling came into his heart. What did the boy remember of those past days? The episode of the rosary—the visit to the Oratory—the refusal of confirmation—the statement of the hospital nurse dismissed so summarily—all formed a certain sequence. Perhaps in the boy's mind, so reticent, so reserved, these things were still indelibly impressed.

"I forbid you to talk about Miss Tibbit or mention her name," said Lord Strode severely, and with gathering anger; "she was not a fit person to have charge of you!"

"I am sorry," said the boy; "I had not meant to speak of her."

"She was a very injudicious foolish person. She taught you many things that were false and evil!"

Ambrose looked up quickly.

"But she was very kind," he said; "she used to nurse me when I was ill. And my mother loved her." Across the dim vista of those years his mind made an effort to clutch at and hold those vague and dormant, but exquisite memories. "I am sure that she did not teach me anything that was evil." . . .

"Don't contradict me! I tell you she was not a fit person for you to know!" Lord Strode's voice rang with rising passion. "You must not speak to me like that." He struck Ambrose a

sharp blow across the face with his riding whip.

Ambrose put up his hand to his face; for a moment he felt bewildered with the pain.

"I am sorry," he said, "I will not speak of her again." He was very white, and the mark of the blow showed dully red upon his cheek.

"I think you had better have a tutor these holidays since you can't go to school. I can't have you idling about like this. You got thoroughly spoilt when you were ill, and you think you can say and do just as you like."

When they reached Merrywood, Ambrose went up to his room, feeling once more in deep disgrace. He had the same room at the top of the house which his father had always occupied. So there would be a tutor. He was glad of that—he hoped he would be as nice as the last one who had been there during the Christmas holidays. Some one young and with whom he could go for walks and rides. There was a motor now, and sometimes he was allowed to go for expeditions in it. On the whole, he was glad to think he would not be left quite so much to himself.

Now as Lord Strode sat alone over his study fire his thoughts were completely occupied with his grandson. He was a little sorry that he had lost his temper and struck him, but he had been thoroughly irritated by that glimpse into his mind. There was something so aloof about the boy. Not hostile, not rebellious, but quietly and irremediably detached. Neither of his own sons had been so difficult to deal with. Gifford had been, when he chose, openly mutinous, flagrantly

disobedient, sometimes reckless of consequences, and sometimes hideously deceitful. But almost always one knew why. There had been nothing reticent, nothing hidden. All was revealed in a rush of passionate words with a defiant rebellion, and even when he had deliberately lied as a child, that had not been difficult to discover. But with this boy there was an unknown and occult factor at work, as if an invisible hand were guiding him surely but secretly. It was almost as if the spirit of his dead mother had never left him. Lord Strode was not a religious man, but he was extremely and violently superstitious, although he would never have admitted it. Yet when he looked at Ambrose, he almost always had this absurd and superstitious thought. Early influences counted for much, yet surely if they were abruptly removed with a rupture both sudden and complete, it was impossible in his opinion that they could be of abiding duration or possess any permanency. And he flattered himself that in flinging aside Miss Tibbit he had finally and definitely cut the last cord that bound Ambrose to his old undesirable environment. He had watched the boy closely for more than nine years, and he had seen him grow up in a curious detachment from all his surroundings. External wealth did not touch him. He did not spend his pocket-money; he seemed to have no desire at all for material things. He simply accepted the life that had been imposed upon him—the normal healthy life of an English schoolboy, who is also the heir of a great house, with considerable wealth awaiting him. His work was always nor-

mal; his place at school the average one for a boy of his age. For some years his conduct had been described as excellent. But nearly every master added that he was a difficult boy temperamentally—hard to know—and abnormally reserved. Always there was a lack of enthusiasm. He worked and played conscientiously. These rather negative admissions had often irritated Lord Strode, because they plainly showed him that the boy never revealed himself to any one—he was exactly the same at school as he was at home. He was never in touch with realities. There was something aggravatingly mysterious about him. . . .

"I wonder what else he said to Cat?" he thought. It was disquieting—this recrudescence of Tibby and of Palermo days.

"It is all waiting for me. . . . When I am a man I shall go back!" . . .

Had he heard those words they might have given him—wilfully obtuse as he was—a clue and key to those interior influences which were shaping the boy's soul for its ultimate end.

At dinner that night Lady Strode said innocently:

"Did you hurt your face out hunting to-day?"

Ambrose's cheek was bruised and slightly grazed. He flushed but did not answer. Lord Strode struck in sharply:

"Ambrose was very rude and contradicted me. And for once he got what he thoroughly deserved!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

“**A**RE you alone, Ambrose?” Cat swung up the drive, followed by a tribe of muddy Pekingese dogs. Her short skirts revealed stout boots; her small hands were enclosed in large leather gloves. She brandished a whip with a long lash, chiefly for purposes of menace.

“Yes. Every one is out. Grannie is driving, and my grandfather is in town this week.”

“Then let me come and have schoolroom tea with you.”

Her bright friendly face made the boy—shy as he was—feel suddenly at his ease.

“Oh, do come,” he said; “it ought to be ready in about ten minutes. And bring the dogs. What jolly little things. We’ll go up the back staircase if you don’t mind.”

“Lord Strode doesn’t like dogs in the house?”

“No.” He laughed. “Especially muddy ones. I often wish I had a dog.” He picked one up and cuddled it; it was soft and warm and licked his face. Then he led the way indoors.

Tea was always a solitary meal for him unless he had a tutor. Lord Strode, who had had to be in town on business, was also going to interview tutors. Ambrose could never remember having a grown-up guest before, and he felt a little timid about entertaining her. But Cat made herself quite at home, and ate large slices

of bread and jam and cake, and helped the Pekingese to milk in her own saucer. When she had finished she lit a cigarette and sat over the fire smoking, while the dogs lay curled up at her feet and slept.

"I'm to have a new tutor next week," said Ambrose.

"Oh, shall you like that?"

"It depends," said Ambrose; "but if he's like the last I shall be glad. I'm rather lonely, pottering about all day by myself. I'm not allowed to hunt more than once a week, and I'm not supposed to do regular lessons since I was ill."

"What do you do?" she asked curiously.

"I read a lot. I'm very fond of reading."

"What do you read?"

He reddened a little. "Oh, all kinds of books! I'm allowed to take anything out of the library now except novels. I mayn't take them without asking, but I don't care about them. I like reading poetry—most of the other boys think it's rot—but I don't. I found an old book the other day by a poet called Crashaw. Do you know his poems?"

"No—I'm not literary, you know. I don't think I've ever heard of him."

"And there's another one I like most awfully. His name is Francis Thompson. I don't understand all of his, but some are beautiful."

"I've heard of him. Read me something," she said.

"Oh, may I really?" He fetched the book and began to read aloud those strange mysterious honeyed numbers:

Where is the land of Luthany,
Where is the tract of Elenore?
I am bound therefor.
Pierce thy heart to find the key,
With thee take
Only what none else would keep;
Learn to dream when thou dost wake,
Learn to wake when thou dost sleep.
Learn to water joy with tears,
Learn from fears to vanquish fears;
To hope, for thou dar'st not despair,
Exult, for that thou dar'st not grieve,
Plow thou the rock until it bear;
Know, for thou else couldst not believe;
Lose, that the lost thou may'st receive;
Die, for none other way canst live.
When earth and Heaven lay down their veil,
And that apocalypse turns thee pale;
When thy seeing blindeth thee
To what thy fellow-mortals see;
When their sight to thee is sightless;
Their living, death; their light, most lightless;
Search no more—

Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region Elenore.

"Do you like that?" he asked eagerly. The boy's face was almost transfigured; his eyes were bright and rapt.

"Yes. It's a little difficult, isn't it?" she said. "You know he had a very sad life, and used to sell matches in the Strand. He was a Catholic."

"A Catholic?" Ambrose laid down the book and gazed at her.

"Yes. I wonder they let you read his poems."

"Why?" he asked.

His heart beat; he felt that perhaps now he was going to learn something quite definite and

illuminating from Lady Kathleen. Some solution of the barriers that hedged him round so securely, prisoning him between the narrow walls of Merrywood—he who had once known the wild spaces of the sun! . . .

“I’m not sure if I ought to say,” she answered.

“You can tell me,” he said slowly; “I have learned not to speak of some things here. I do not know why, but it makes my grandfather angry. He used to punish me. And there has never been any one to ask. I should like to know. I think it would make things easier.”

His face was so eager and excited that he looked almost handsome. And this was Gifford’s son, whose flaming dark eyes were fixed upon her.

“Well, you know,” said Cat, rather reluctantly, “I have been told that your mother was a Catholic, and that is why she never came to Merrywood. She brought you up as one, and she wouldn’t let your father have charge of you. When she died they found you and took you away. You mustn’t be a Catholic, you see. You are the heir, and no Catholic can inherit the Strode property—the first Lord Strode put that in his will. He had a son who was a Jesuit priest, and it put him violently against the Church.”

Ambrose was silent; his fingers played idly with the silken fringes of a Pekingese’s ears.

“I suppose I’m very indiscreet to tell you all this—but you will have to know it some day.”

“Do you think,” he said slowly, “that I was baptized a Catholic?”

"Oh, I'm sure you must have been. Your mother's being one was the principal reason why your father never acknowledged her, and no one knew about her till after he was dead. He was afraid to bring a Catholic wife to Merrywood."

Ambrose gave a sigh almost of relief. She had lifted the nebulous clouds that had for so many years bewildered and perplexed him. He had been stumbling in darkness, and now he had suddenly emerged from those enveloping shadows into full bright daylight. Everything was quite simple, with a hard and crystal clearness.

"You were so little—I don't suppose you remember anything that you learnt before you came here. You were scarcely more than a baby when your mother died."

Ambrose was silent.

"It's lucky for you, my dear boy, that they have had the bringing up of you here."

She spoke lightly, but still he did not answer.

"It's such nonsense—all that fuss about religion. Don't you think so yourself? You might have had to remain miserably poor, instead of being the heir to this beautiful place with heaps of money! What a lucky boy you are, Ambrose! And you were in such danger of losing it all! Why do you look so solemn?"

His mind seemed to be repeating the words: "*Lose, that the lost thou may'st receive. . . . Die, for none other way canst live. . . . When thy seeing blindeth thee To what thy fellow mortals see—Search no more. Pass the gates of Luthany—tread the region Elenore.*" . . .

"I never understood before" . . . he said dreamily.

"I wonder they didn't tell you. You're not a baby now."

"But I'm so glad you've told me, Lady Kathleen!" His face broke into one of those sudden, enchanting smiles that seemed to illuminate his whole countenance.

"Well, you'll know now never to let yourself be entrapped by the errors of Rome!" she said lightly.

Still, she felt a little misgiving lest she had said too much, spoken too frankly, and had thus put the boy in possession of certain facts which it had not been considered desirable for him to know.

"It was my mother's faith," he said slowly, "and Tibby's." He began to understand his grandfather's harsh condemnation of Tibby. Had he not said that she had taught him things that were false and evil?

"But for you it would be an expensive luxury. Your father wasn't a Catholic, Ambrose."

"Yes—I see" . . . he said.

She rose now, and the little yellow dogs jumped up too, and began to bark and yelp and gambol. They were getting bored by her lengthy visit.

Ambrose followed her downstairs.

"I'll go out the garden way," she said; "it's too late for me to ask to see Lady Strode. And I must be getting back!"

"Thank you very much for coming," said the boy.

She was not one to whom he could confide the secret of that strange second life that so absorbed and controlled him. But she had set a lamp in his path, given him a key to the riddle that had seemed so cruel.

Moved by a sudden impulse she bent down and kissed his forehead.

"You're a dear boy," she said, "and you must come and have tea with Guy one of these days. Then we can have another long talk."

"I should like to come very much," he said. He wanted to thank her for kissing him. He watched her as she went down the drive, followed by the scrimmaging, yelping dogs. Then he went into the library and found that his grandmother had returned.

"Whose dogs were those?" she asked.

"They were Lady Kathleen's, Grannie," he said. "I met her in the drive, and she said she would like to have schoolroom tea as you were out. She has just gone—and she thought it would be too late to see you."

"How very odd of her," said Lady Strode. "But Cat was always a queer creature."

Ambrose was alone in the schoolroom two days later when his grandfather returned. Although it was not quite the end of November, the weather had turned very cold, and a light fall of snow had powdered the lawn and the gravelled drive. There had been a wonderful, though stormy, sunset behind the knoll of stripped beech-trees on the top of the down where it was said that a Saxon chief lay entombed. Gold and crimson with

strange lurid gashes of purple filled the western sky, and one or two stars already displayed their pale and trembling lamps.

The boy had watched it with a strange sense of disquietude. It was beautiful and terrible too—this almost fiercely-painted pageant of the heavens. He had knelt down and prayed, hiding his face in his hands. Yes—he was wasting these slow, interminable, unprofitable years. There should have been for him other things, filling the days with riches unspeakable; the desire of them filled his soul with a hunger that was like a fierce, gnawing pain.

Lady Kathleen had lifted the veil. She had not perhaps realized what she was doing when she explained his position fully to him. That was already two days ago. Although Ambrosé was going on for fifteen, no hint of the truth had until now reached him. He was in some ways almost painfully precocious; in others, very much of a child. Obedience enjoined upon him a complete compliance with his grandfather's commands, imposing silence almost as a duty. On the other hand, he had now, for the first time in his life, an intense desire to speak quite openly to Lord Strode, and to tell him that he knew and understood his own position, and entreat of him the one thing—that he might be a Catholic, in deed as well as in name, and practise his religion. It was what he needed more and more—so much, indeed, that he had almost ceased to need anything else. He longed to throw himself at Lord Strode's feet and tell him this without reservation. And then the thought of that stern and

frozen face came back to his mind, chilling his ardor. He was afraid . . . he was a coward. There had been child-martyrs in the past, boys and even little girls, younger, frailer, than himself, who had faced death courageously in horrible forms for the faith. He remembered Tibby telling him the story of the little Saint Crescentia, a girl of thirteen, whose body had been found in the Catacombs with the marks of the teeth of wild beasts indenting the skull. And he—with no fear of death—did not dare openly to confess his faith to his grandfather, nor go to him and say: *"I am a Catholic, and all these years that I have been with you I have never forgotten that I am one, and I ask you to let me practise my religion."*

The worst consequences would be a thrashing, and he was not afraid of that; he had endured it too often, and his grandfather's anger had lost some of its terrors for him. But he was afraid of Lord Strode, afraid of him in a way he could not explain. There was an ultimate frozen hardness about him that was terrifying. And there was no hope of his granting the request even if it were made. He would still further restrict his liberty. As Ambrose was meditating upon all the bewildering possibilities of the situation, he heard the motor purring along the drive. As he watched he saw his grandfather's tall, lean, upright form alight. He was alone and unaccompanied.

When he went downstairs Lord Strode said to him:

"I've found a tutor for you, but he can't come for about three weeks. He will be here in the

Christmas holidays, and Robin is coming too, so you will be able to share him. Robin is working for the Army, and he can't afford to be idle these holidays, and so he isn't going abroad with his mother."

CHAPTER XXXVII

ROBIN had not wished to go to Merrywood for Christmas, and felt decidedly bored at the prospect. He wished to go to Switzerland for the winter sports, and the thought of staying at Merrywood and working with a tutor was a dreary one. Moreover, he felt so much older than Ambrose now that he regarded him as quite a small boy. He liked boys of his own age or older than himself. At this stage he was a little inclined to despise his cousin.

"Slacker!" he said, when they went up to the schoolroom soon after his arrival. "Why didn't you turn up this half?"

"Because I had typhoid fever in the summer," said Ambrose, "and I wasn't allowed to do any work. But we are going to have a tutor."

"Yes—so Uncle John told me. Beastly rot doing work in the holidays."

He threw himself into an arm-chair and stretched out his legs. He was a very handsome boy, like the Lumleights, with crisp, fair hair and bright blue eyes. He looked strong and big and healthy. Ambrose envied him his splendid height and good looks. He felt more than ever puny beside him.

"Oh, I hope you won't find it very dull here, Robin," he said anxiously. "I am going to

work, too, when Mr. Barclay comes. I'm not as high up as my father and uncle were at my age, and that is a disappointment to Grandfather."

"Well, of course he wants you to be clever and all that," said Robin, looking at him a little disdainfully.

"I wish you were the heir, Robin," said Ambrose regretfully. "I'm not a bit what Grandfather wants me to be!" He looked at him wistfully.

"Well, I was supposed to be the heir at one time," said Robin; "and once for a few months or weeks, I forget which, the mater thought I was going to inherit after Uncle John. Then you turned up abroad somewhere. I was too small to care, but she was awfully cut up about it. You must admit it was a facer for her, and for a long time she insisted upon believing that you were dead, and that they would never find you. Then Mr. Hurrell found you abroad. She said it was just what she should always have expected of Uncle Gifford—to leave a wife and baby, whom no one knew anything about, hidden away somewhere!"

"I wish they hadn't found me. I wish you had been the heir, Robin," he said thoughtfully. "I think they would have liked you much better."

"Oh, I've always got on very well with Uncle John," said Robin loftily; "he only wants understanding. I daresay he's a bit of a Tartar."

Robin, sharp, observant, with a certain worldly shrewdness, noticed many things during those weeks spent at Merrywood that winter. He saw

that Ambrose still remained quite "out of the picture," and that this fact was even more obvious than it had been when he first came as a little boy. Although he had lived there now for more than nine years, he did not seem to belong to Merrywood at all. He was more like an alien than a grandson of the house. The thin, dark, delicate-looking boy, the only youthful creature in this somber old house, was in it, but not of it. With his grandfather he was always ill at ease, shy, nervous, and timid. With Lady Strode he was less embarrassed and reserved; but even to her he was painfully courteous in a stiff, deferential, old-fashioned way. With Robin himself he was gentle and submissive, eager to wait upon him, to "fag" for him, treating him more like a guest than a comrade and an equal. There was something strange about his position at Merrywood. No one noticed him much except to rebuke him. His nervousness made him almost clumsy, especially at table. Lord Strode was often both angry and sarcastic with him. The humility of Ambrose struck Robin as a thing quite unusual and very painful to witness. He seemed to accept in a detached way, that yet was not quite indifferent, all the scolding and reprimanding he so constantly received. Robin had never had any kind of petty domestic tyranny to endure, and he was amazed at this exhibition of quiet and patient endurance. Then if Ambrose stammered and his broken English became more apparent than usual, Lord Strode was always violently irritated with him, and that made matters worse.

"Are you never going to learn to speak English, Ambrose?" he would say, with a sarcasm that made the boy flinch a little.

It was only one of many little things, but even Robin found that the perpetual fault-finding got on his own nerves.

"Why don't you try and get on better with Uncle John?" he asked one day, when they started out for a walk after an unusually heated scene at luncheon.

"I can't help it, Robin," said Ambrose.

"You always manage to irritate him. He's never like that to me!"

"But he likes you, Robin," said Ambrose rather wistfully.

"But surely he likes you too? You are his grandson and I'm only a cousin, and not a very near one."

It was a rash speech and Ambrose waited a moment before replying.

"I don't think he likes me very much. I am a disappointment to him. You must see for yourself that I am stupid—different from other boys, and that annoys him. You mustn't blame him."

"No—I blame you," said Robin bluntly.

"I know it is my fault. But I do try and please him."

"Yes—you try too hard. We're all painfully aware of that. Why can't you be more like other boys? Why don't you speak frankly instead of in that shy, stupid way? You're afraid of him, and you show it."

"I am afraid when he speaks as he did to-day.

He is so clever, and he can say such bitter things—things that hurt.” . . .

“You must be very miserable,” said Robin; “before I came here this time I was only thinking what a jolly lucky chap you were—more to be envied almost than any one I know. You’ll have lots of money, and the mater and I are often jolly hard up, and have to travel second class, and put up at cheap hotels. But now I’ve seen you here I don’t envy you at all. I’m awfully sorry for you, only I can’t help seeing it’s a lot your own fault!”

Ambrose was silent. Suddenly he slipped his hand in Robin’s.

“Oh, Robin,” he said, “do let us be friends.”

“All right,” said Robin; “don’t be soppy about it!”

“I’m not soppy . . . but I mean . . . do try and not dislike me too much. I can’t help being as I am. I only wish you were in my place—you would be ever so much more suited to it than I am. Grandfather would be proud of you. I know he is almost ashamed of me. . . . I’m so little and stupid, and I speak English so badly.” . . .

“Perhaps it’s partly because he didn’t like your father’s marriage,” said Robin. “I know he didn’t approve of it—the mater told me.”

“But he didn’t know about it till my father died.”

“But he knew once that Uncle Gifford wanted to marry your mother—the mater was here at the time, and there was an awful row about it.”

"Oh, was there?" said Ambrose, deeply interested.

"Yet they must have been properly married, or you wouldn't be the heir," said Robin musingly. "I wonder what there was against her?"

"There was nothing against her!" Ambrose's dark eyes flashed. "She was a saint . . . and she was beautiful. I can remember her—she loved me—she was always kind." . . . For the first time in all Robin's experience of him he spoke warmly, as if aroused from his long apathy. But he broke off suddenly. Yes—there had been something against her. He remembered Lady Kathleen's words. She was a Catholic, and that was why his father had never dared bring her to Merrywood, that was why he had never dared speak of his marriage, and had never told them that beyond the sea there was a wife whom he loved . . . and a little son who was heir to the Strode property.

"There must have been something, though," said Robin rather persistently. "Perhaps it's something they haven't told you!"

"They never mention her," said Ambrose; "but then they do not often speak of my father."

"The mater says that I was looked upon as the heir presumptive when your father died," said Robin; "and it was in the peerages for one year—she showed it to me once. They couldn't hear any news of you, you see. And then one day Uncle John wrote and told her that you had been found somewhere abroad. It was a great blow to her, of course. But Uncle John has

been very good in paying all my expenses at school, and he is going to give me an allowance when I'm in the Army."

"Oh, Robin—you'll think me ungrateful, but I do wish they had never found me. I wish you were in my place. You're so splendid—and you'd fit in so well. I can't help thinking you're just the kind of boy they would like me to be—just the one my grandfather would like to have for his heir. He is so fond of you already, and you get on so well with him. You never do awkward, clumsy things . . . or speak with a foreign accent."

"Oh, rot!" said Robin, reddening under the praise. "We can't alter it now, Ambrose. And you must jolly well learn to fit in!" He straightened himself; he was accustomed to giving his juniors scraps of advice and warning, and it must be said that he was as little priggish as it was possible to be under the circumstances. "It's a lesson, you know—just the same as any other, and it's your duty to learn it. . . . It's up to you to learn how to please him, and not look every moment as if he were going to bite you! The mater thinks an awful lot of Uncle John, and he's been jolly decent to her. I suppose you can't help the way you speak, but, of course, it sounds rotten in an English boy. Your mother wasn't a foreigner, was she?"

"No—she was English, but she had lived abroad all her life—in France when she was a little girl, and in Italy after she married. She died in Palermo, and it was in Rome that Mr. Hurrell found us. I didn't know who he was

then, but he told Tibby he was going to take me away. I was very fond of Tibby—I can still remember crying at having to leave her.”

“But still all that happened ages ago,” said Robin carelessly; “I wonder you can remember it all so distinctly. I can hardly remember anything that happened when I was five, except falling down and breaking my arm on the ice—and even that seems very vague.”

But Ambrose could remember well his first days at Merrywood, the loneliness, the pain of them. Those old incidents were too sharply etched upon his memory ever to be quite forgotten. He had come from a little world of love and tenderness and patient understanding—such a world as Robin had perhaps known all his life—to one of harsh discipline when the things that had once been right had suddenly become wrong—so wrong that he was punished for doing them. It had been an upheaval, and he—old for his years, as children brought up abroad often are—could not forget his inability to adjust the past with the present, finding them to be in such fierce antagonism. And quite recently Lady Kathleen had taught him the meaning of it all, and had shown him why he had been thus punished, why they had striven to eliminate from his mind all that his mother and Tibby had taught him of their faith. But he could not speak to Robin of this. He had a strong feeling that his cousin would fully share Lady Kathleen’s views upon the ultimate wisdom of his grandfather’s action. Those who could have understood and sympathized had never been suffered to remain in his

life. There had been Mr. Standish, and there had been the nurse who had lent him, for a little while, her rosary when he was ill. . . . Between him and all his own little world there was a rigid though invisible barrier, and he could not break it down. He crouched in the shadows, not daring to emerge. Those two living human beings who could have helped him had been swept remorselessly from his sight before he had fully realized their proximity. Only his prayers—his secret and passionate prayers—joined him to his mother's world. Through the years these, at least, had never failed. He had prayed that he might never forget them . . . and he had not forgotten. He knew that they formed but a meager part of the enormous wealth of his spiritual heritage of which he had been robbed. He had no power, no knowledge, to add to them. But they held him securely to the past, like fine cords finely spun. . . .

The new tutor, Claude Barclay, was a rather delicate young man who had only recently left Oxford, where he had won many honors before he broke down from over-work. . . . He was a scholar of a college renowned for its learning and for the exalted names of those who had left it, to find more fame in the world that lay beyond those ancient gray walls. From the first he rather openly showed his preference for Robin Lumleigh. He was easier to understand; he was a charming boy, with frank, engaging manners; his ready intelligence and quick perception delighted Claude Barclay. Ambrose, silent,

studious and slow, though always anxious to do his best, was of quite another type. He found himself, as usual, a little left out in the cold. Robin quickly made friends, and being accustomed to the society of people much older than himself, soon preferred being with Mr. Barclay to being with his cousin. Ambrose, in consequence, rather effaced himself. He was neither jealous nor huffy that his cousin should so promptly desert him for Mr. Barclay. He simply accepted the situation, just as he had always accepted the fact of Robin's greater popularity and brilliance. He was far behind him in knowledge—even more so than the difference in their ages justified. But since his illness he found he had forgotten a good deal, and this made his ignorance the more marked. He was also far behind Robin in knowledge of the world. He had never traveled nor been about at all since he first came to Merrywood. Robin seemed to have been everywhere; he had yachted with his mother, he had been to Switzerland for winter sports, and he had explored the galleries of Paris, Dresden and Munich. It made Ambrose feel a very dull boy indeed when he heard Robin and Mr. Barclay discussing their experiences. He kept like a little unobtrusive shadow in the background. He half envied Robin this capacity for making friends as well as his charm of manner, his good looks, his ready conversation. No barrier shut him in; no cords bound him; no walls enclosed and imprisoned him. He had no secret life. He was very frank, ready to talk about himself, eager to listen when others spoke.

There was a tremendous energy about him which all seemed part of his splendid physique. He had no time for dreams and he had nothing to hide. It was for this last reason that Ambrose envied him most. Surely somewhere he, too, might have lived with nothing to hide, where he, too, could have spoken openly and frankly of the things that were so precious to him. The sense of imprisonment pressed heavily in those days; he longed to shake himself free of those barriers and go forth. . . .

Robin's voice broke sharply across his dreams.

"Look sharp, Ambrose—why don't you get on with your French exercise? I've done mine ages ago."

Ambrose took up his pen, and reddened as his eyes fell upon the still untouched sheet of paper.

"I was thinking" . . . he said.

"You day-dream like a girl!" said Robin, with a touch of scorn. "However, it's your loss. You'll be left behind again when we go for our walk!"

This had happened very frequently of late. Ambrose had performed his tasks so slowly that he had had to stay at home to finish them. And to-day he longed to be out in the downs. It would be beautiful there—with the silver glimmer of the sea shining like a dropped winter sunbeam beyond the gray-green hills and the purple leafless woods. He longed to feel the wind sweeping like cool and delicate fingers against his brow.

"Not finished yet, Ambrose?" said Claude Barclay, coming into the room.

"I am sorry to be so slow," he said in his pretty broken English.

"Don't roll your r's like that," said Mr. Barclay sharply. He had received particular instructions from Lord Strode to check this predisposition in his grandson.

"Say it over twelve times without rolling your r's. 'I am sorry to be so slow.'"

"Sorry" was always a dreadful stumbling-block. Ambrose tried and failed.

"Begin again. Twelve times more."

The tutor showed signs of impatience. So did Robin, but in a lesser degree. Ambrose obeyed with a nervousness that was painful to witness. . . . He felt that Robin was watching him with mingled pity and contempt, as if he were a very little boy indeed. It hurt him, and he felt sore and bruised. "*I am sorry to be so slow.*" . . . How absurd and meaningless the sentence sounded when he had repeated it half a dozen times, his cheeks crimson, his eyes downcast.

He was glad when the ordeal was over and he was left alone. Tears of humiliation stung his eyes. He could hear Robin and Mr. Barclay talking quite gaily as they passed beneath the window, along the path that led to the fields and so up to the downs.

"The painful part is that he *knows* he's a duffer!" he heard Robin say in his careless voice. He felt miserably stupid, wretchedly inadequate. All his training had tended to make him self-conscious, and Robin made him vividly aware of his own short-comings. Still, he wished he had not spoken of him to Mr. Barclay like that.

Robin must thoroughly despise him. He had stood there like a child, repeating that absurd sentence while Robin looked on with scornful amusement. It had been a moment of deep abasement. But every day there occurred some little episode of the kind, depriving him of all courage to face the ordeal of lunching with his grandparents.

"Why didn't you go for a walk to-day, Ambrose?" Lord Strode inquired.

"I hadn't finished my work." . . .

"And why was that?" He turned to Mr. Barclay for illumination.

"Ambrose is lacking in concentration," said Claude Barclay.

"He's lacking in a good many things," said Lord Strode. "If he won't work he must be made to."

Then there was silence, during which Ambrose felt like a guilty, almost criminal culprit. Afterwards, when they were alone, Robin said to him:

"It's getting worse and worse. You'd better pull yourself together, Ambrose! You're getting morbid. Be happy, and show Uncle John that you are happy here. Or else tell him plainly and frankly the reason why!"

Ambrose whitened.

"The reason why?" he faltered.

"Well, you couldn't be such a silly idiot as not to have a reason for being so miserable. Any one with half an eye can see that you are hating it all. Tell him why, and have done with it! And if there is a row—a good row often clears the air!"

But he did not force his cousin's confidence by this admonition. Ambrose admired and loved Robin almost more than any one else in the world, but he never confided in him. He was so permanently, so unalterably on the Other Side!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ON the whole, Eton was a time of happiness for Ambrose. He was in the same house with Robin, and Robin, though much older, was always kind. Their friendship deepened, and on Ambrose's side it was not unmixed with hero-worship. He made immense efforts to please Robin, and incidentally to please his grandfather. Those years were not lost in the ultimate formation of his character. The interior life was less violently in the ascendant but it never lost its grip upon him. He was old enough to realize that he was passing through a time of probation, that the fact of daily and hourly endeavoring to acquit himself well would be of inestimable value in the future. He saw his grandfather's attitude towards him in a new light. It had never been tyranny for the sake of tyranny; it had been simply a question of making him fitted for his future position. He knew now that he had increased the difficulty of Lord Strode's task by his own mute, tacit, unremitting opposition to him. That opposition had aroused a more determined obstinacy on the part of Lord Strode. Definite evidence that the boy was yielding was still lacking. He had never shown any sign of submission on the

one point. He had gone on hugging his secret with grim pertinacity, until he had found himself committed to a double life—one of tacit outward submission, one of interior spiritual rebellion. The rift, never openly disclosed, had bred an impatience and an irritability in the older man, who naturally wished for his grandson's welfare on the lines he himself desired and planned. He had often been harsh and severe; he had been aware that the child was not happy; there was no confidence and but little love between them. The state of affairs had threatened to become almost insupportable during that winter of Mr. Barclay's stay at Merrywood. It was then that Robin's intervention had been productive of good results. Quietly he had set himself to remedy the matter. He was fond of both Lord Strode and Ambrose, and desired to act as peace-maker between them. Boy as he was, his influence worked wonders, and the friction grew less and less.

When Ambrose had been three years at Eton Robin lost his mother. She had been in indifferent health for some time, and her death followed upon a long period of complete invalidism. Robin went away and did not afterwards return to Eton. He was broken-hearted and crushed by his loss, and Ambrose read his letter announcing it with a compassion that was like physical pain. It was so unlike Robin—this hurried, blotted letter, stained with tears.

Robin was eighteen, and by his mother's will Lord Strode was appointed sole guardian until

he came of age. After the funeral he went to Merrywood and spent some weeks there, while Ambrose remained at Eton.

At first he missed Robin very much, but in reality the elder boy's absence was beneficial to him and made him more independent. Physically, he was now somewhat stronger, and though still small for his age, his slim grace somewhat compensated for the lack of inches. He had, however, a slight stoop which gave him a studious air. Very dark as to eyes and hair, his complexion was pale and olive-hued, and his face rather thin and long. He was not handsome, but his eyes, so like Yolande's in their dusky radiance, were beautiful, and his sudden rare smiles lit up a face that was ordinarily too somber and inexpressive. The habit of reticence had early impressed his features with a reserved inscrutable look. Many people found his taciturnity repellent; a few who pushed a little beyond externals discovered the peculiar maturity of his mind and the depth of mystical wisdom that guided him. Now he worked well and assiduously, and was considered advanced for his age. All his reports were admirable. Lord Strode congratulated himself upon the success of his own system of breaking in a difficult boy. He considered that now there would be no further trouble with him. He began to show something of the early stability of character displayed by Reginald, coupled with a more docile and unselfish disposition. Of course, he had not the natural charm and winning grace of Robin Lumleigh, who day by day became dearer to his

guardian. Still Ambrose undoubtedly possessed very sterling qualities. The friendship between the two boys pleased Lord Strode. It was right that they should be friends, and only natural that their holidays should be spent together at Merrywood.

But when they first met after Robin's bereavement, Ambrose felt a strange sense of constraint and embarrassment. His cousin still bore traces of his great grief; he looked older and seemed suddenly to have become a man. He was to go to Oxford in the autumn, having rather given up the idea of entering the army.

Ambrose noticed with surprise the friendship that had sprung up between Robin and Lord Strode. They constantly rode and walked together, and Lord Strode often sent for him to come to his study and discuss the affairs of the estate with him. He had done this in the first instance from a kindly wish to wean the boy's mind from his great sorrow, but Robin's quick intelligence, his readiness to grasp things, his sympathy with any difficulty, soon made his guardian consult him for his own sake. Perhaps neither of his two sons had ever shown themselves quite so ready to help him in every way as Robin did. Little by little he became something of a secretary to Lord Strode, whose eyesight was somewhat failing, so that he was glad to have some of his correspondence taken off his hands. And Robin attached himself to Lord Strode, for he had a passionate need of affection and his mother's death had left him starving. His influence was a softening one.

It made Lord Strode much more gentle to Ambrose. He was seldom now angry or irritable with him; he ceased to lash him with fierce sarcasm or hold him up to ridicule. Ambrose, acutely sensitive to this milder mood, expanded a little, came out of his shell. He was much too generous ever to be jealous, and he never envied Robin for the affection Lord Strode so openly bestowed upon him. He was convinced that Robin was a far worthier object of any one's affection than he could ever be. It seemed only natural that Robin should be preferred before him. He liked, indeed, to see his hero decked in the laurel-leaves of conquest. Robin seemed to him in those days more superb and splendid than he had ever done before. And even to an impartial eye he was a fine specimen of early manhood. Tall, broad-chested, with frank blue eyes and crisp fair hair, he stood well over six feet, and his movements were lithe and graceful. He had a charming expression and manner, and was always entirely at his ease. Ambrose could not help seeing with a new admiration how completely he belonged to Merrywood; how entirely he must fulfil Lord Strode's ideal. The knowledge did not make Ambrose at all unhappy; he was incapable of any mean feelings, and a new serenity came into his heart.

Ambrose's twenty-first birthday fell in April, but owing to Lady Strode's illness all festivities in connection with it were postponed until the summer, as she was still at Cannes with her hus-

band. It was many years since Merrywood Place had been shut up for so long a time. Ambrose, who was at Oxford, spent the Easter vacation in town with Robin, who now had a little flat of his own there.

While Ambrose had been under his grandfather's roof a certain loyalty had constrained him to take no further steps in the direction which all his life had been so plainly and persistently indicated to him, but now he was of age and his own master. Already he was the recipient of the large income he had inherited from his father, but his tastes remained simple, and he spent but little of it. Robin told him laughingly that he had no idea how to spend money, and he recognized the truth of this speech.

"But I want to spend some now," he said, "I wish you would come abroad with me, Robin."

"Why, where on earth should we go? They don't want us at Cannes," said Robin.

"Anywhere you like. But I should like to go to Italy."

"Italy?" said Robin. "Why do you want to go to Italy?"

Ambrose's eyes shone with a queer radiance.

"Let's go to Rome, Robin," he said.

"Let's go to Rome, Robin.'" Robin mimicked him, for the r's of this sentence had been very guttural, as they still were when Ambrose was at all excited.

"It wouldn't be half bad," he said. "I've always wanted to go to Italy."

They left Charing Cross on the following

morning. To Ambrose the train throbbed to the rhythm of a single sentence that plowed through all his thoughts.

"I am going back. . . . I am going back." . . .

His heart beat suffocatingly. He wondered how Robin could look so calm and composed and unmoved. Sixteen years had passed since he had made that journey—a little sobbing boy who refused to be comforted. Now he was going back to the land of his dreams; he prayed that those dreams might come true.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ROBIN found a number of friends and acquaintances in Rome. People at the Embassy, people who lived there, people staying in huge hotels. The city was crowded for Easter. Ambrose stole away during Holy Week, and attended the somber splendid services that marked those last four days of the penitential season. He was glad to find that his cousin betrayed no interest in his movements, and did not trouble his head about him. Ambrose had hired a motor and had placed it at Robin's service. They did not often meet, for Robin lunched and dined out nearly every day.

Ambrose spent a great deal of his time in St. Peter's. How well he remembered it—so well that when he first entered it, it was strangely familiar. He remembered the half circle of glimmering lamps that shone above the crypt where the Apostle lay entombed. It was there that Mr. Hurrell had discovered him and Tibby.

On Good Friday Robin suggested that they should attend a service at the English Church, and was a little surprised when Ambrose refused.

"Do go alone, Robin," he said, "I . . . I have got an engagement."

"I've always wondered why you weren't more religious, Ambrose," Robin said. "Most quiet thoughtful men like you go in for that sort of thing. But you've always cold-shouldered it."

Ambrose's face remained bleak and enigmatic. He did not reply, and Robin did not press the subject. Soon he would have to be told—soon all his little world would know. . . .

There was a very well-known English priest, a convert, called Father Pacificus, staying in Rome at that time. Ambrose deliberately sought an interview with him. He was staying at a quiet hotel near the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva. Like Nicodemus seeking instruction, Ambrose went to see him at night. He found himself face to face with a tall ascetic-looking man of the conventionally priestly type—aquiline nose, thin lips, a high brow and grave penetrating eyes.

Now he was actually about to confide the secret that he had carried silently in his heart for sixteen years, a sudden shyness overcame him. Then, all shyness forgotten, the words poured from his lips. The secret that had been a burden was laid at human feet. . . . Or who shall say if it was humbly confided not to human ears, but to Divine keeping? . . . Once launched, he told the whole story. It was, even humanly speaking, a thrilling little drama of spiritual experiences. The episode of the rosary, the Five Mysteries never forgotten for one single night, the prayers counted on the fingers when the beads were forfeited, the visit to the Oratory when he was a little boy, the punishments that had followed those transgressions, then the long dogged silence. . . . Nothing was omitted, nothing exaggerated. The son of Yolande, the grandson of Veronica, stood there self-betrayed. . . .

A light almost as of unshed tears shone in the priest's eyes as he listened to this recital of faith.

"And you wish still to become a Catholic?"

"It is not a question of becoming," said Ambrose, "I have always been one. I have never practised my religion since I came to the age of reason. I have never been to Mass—until this week—since I was five. I have never been to confession nor made my First Communion. I remembered only a few prayers, and those I have said night and morning for sixteen years."

"My son—Almighty God has been very merciful to you in giving you the strength to keep the faith untouched in your heart."

"There is another thing," said Ambrose; "since my father's death I have been my grandfather's heir. And as a Catholic I am obliged to forfeit a very large inheritance. But I cannot claim it. There was a clause in my great-grandfather's will excluding Catholics from enjoying the money and property. I have already begun to receive the income which is due to the heir when he comes of age. So you see that I must declare my faith as soon as possible. I am a Catholic, Father, and I can only obtain my inheritance by deliberately and openly apostatizing."

"Which God forbid," said the priest gravely. "You have not told me your name?"

"Ambrose Lumleigh."

"I seem to remember." . . . He looked at him searchingly. "Ambrose," he said, "have you forgotten me? I am Cyril Standish . . . now Father Pacificus."

"I could not think why your face was so familiar to me, and your voice, too," said Ambrose slowly. "For to my knowledge I didn't know any priest in the world. But when you left Mr. Collins's, Bertram told me that you intended to become a Catholic and perhaps a priest. I wished then I had spoken to you. It almost broke my heart to think that help had been so near and I had not known."

"Perhaps God wished you to wait, Ambrose. You were intended perhaps to have this time of trial to prove your faith."

"Father—when may I make my First Communion?"

"My dear boy—you will have to prepare for your first confession, and then we can think about it. But perhaps under the circumstances we need not delay very long."

"Ah," he said, "please don't keep me waiting. . . . I have waited . . . and starved . . . *in torment.*" . . .

It was his first word of rebellion against that long discipline of patience. Now with the haven in sight he felt that he could not endure it any longer. Father Pacificus looked at him with compassion.

"We shall see," he said; "but I think it might well be on Easter Sunday."

"Next Sunday?" Ambrose's emotion was so great that he dropped on his knees and kissed the priest's hand—as long ago Tibby had taught him to do. . . .

"Yes. You can make your confession to-morrow. I will give you some books to help you."

"But on Sunday?" He brushed his hand across his eyes. "It seems impossible . . . to me . . . unworthy." . . .

Later, Ambrose was led on to speak of his mother. He told the outlines of her story in so far as he knew them. And as the priest listened it seemed to him that the hands of this dead woman, who for her faith's sake and for the sake of this boy's faith, had made such deliberate renouncement of human happiness, must have in some mystical sense supported and sustained her son, who had through those years of childhood and boyhood so marvelously corresponded to the promptings of Divine Grace.

"Have you thought at all of your future?" he asked.

Surely the final grace must be given to one who had so long persevered. . . .

"I know what you are thinking of, Father. That has all been part of my dreams." . . .

When he had gone, Father Pacificus meditated over that strange mystery—the apparently overwhelming insistence with which Almighty God sometimes deigns to summon a soul into His direct service, multiplying graces, and enriching it with what can quite reverently be termed an almost invidious generosity, as if the possession of that particular soul were a thing of Divine desire. He could not doubt from what he had just heard that this had been the case with Ambrose Lumleigh—the boy whom for so long he had remembered in his own prayers.

Not alone and unaided could this little child have clung through years of unbroken separation to his early knowledge of the faith. Sustained and upheld by that grace which had been poured out upon him in apparently measureless abundance, his perseverance had increased year by year. Sometimes there were to be seen, even in this modern world, these children of benediction, who walked undeviatingly in the light. . . .

When he had told his story his face had been imbued with a strange illumination. The term mystic is apt to be loosely applied in these days, but there was little doubt that some of his experiences had trespassed upon those undefined and supernatural boundaries. That second and interior life, lived side by side and in apparent harmony with his every-day exterior one, had not been a thing of idle imagination. It was an existence apart and purely spiritual, wherein the soul communed with that which was Unknowable. It had in a sense lifted him above and out of those cares and difficulties which had made those sixteen years a time of such hard and bitter probation. What would happen to that soul, now that it was about to come into its own? It was a soul new-born, yet filled with past experience; a soul deeply mature yet virginally fresh. What new graces were in store for him who had so abundantly proved his stability and unchanging faithfulness? Would he not be as one drunk with possession? . . . Starved, he would come to fulfilment; thirsty, he should drink of the Living Waters. This boy had proved himself to be fashioned of fine clay. He had been single-

minded in his loyalty, in his passionate fidelity. Not often perhaps had a priest—accustomed as all priests must be to the unfolding of such soul dramas—to listen to such an illuminating recital—to look so close upon the infinite working of Divine Grace in the human soul. And he had come so humbly, with that humility which inevitably characterizes the one to whom peculiar graces have been vouchsafed. The time had come when he dared be silent no more. He seemed unaware of any sacrifice in the renouncement of earthly possessions; to leave them, indeed, was to him no sacrifice. He was coming into his own after long waiting, spent in silence and patience and persistent prayer.

On Easter Sunday he made his First Communion in the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva. . . . *"The Bread that I will give is My Flesh . . . for the Life of the World."* The life of the world . . . the life of those uncountable millions—the great multitude whom no man can number . . . for whom Christ died and rose again. . . .

Thus the chains dropped from the hands and feet of Ambrose Lumleigh, and he emerged from the prison which so long had held him, into the full possession of that inheritance where He Whom he had so faithfully served was waiting to enter into his heart.

"Why, Ambrose—how happy you look. I believe you are in love." . . .

Robin met him on the steps of the hotel and addressed him mockingly.

Ambrose smiled. "*Buona Pasqua!*" he said. He held out his hand and grasped his cousin's. "I've given you an Easter gift, Robin, but I can't tell you what it is just yet. You will know later." And he passed into the hotel.

CHAPTER XL

THE preparations for Ambrose's coming of age were arranged upon a very large scale. Lady Strode, who was now completely restored to health, took an active interest in them. Devoted as she had always been to her grandson, she found that he had returned from Italy with a new charm. They had not met until he arrived for the festivities which were fixed for the end of June.

Superb weather prevailed. Huge marquees were erected in the Park for the entertainment of the farmers and tenants as well as for the laborers on the estate. Ambrose took it all very quietly; he had only made a special request that there might be no presentation gifts. He was like one in a dream. He dreaded the moment when he would have to reveal that which he had so long hidden in his heart. There had been an awkward pause, too, when Lord Strode had said to him: "You will of course come to church with us on Sunday! Whatever you may feel, you must not display any open indifference and antagonism." He could not forget how firmly Ambrose had refused Confirmation.

He had been told to prepare the speech which he would inevitably have to make. "Get Robin to help you. He always says the right thing," said Lord Strode. But Ambrose did not resort

to Robin's assistance. What he had to say must be prepared alone. He wished that this dramatic touch could have been avoided. But only thus could he tell his grandfather, and it was also in some sense to justify himself that he desired to make his "great refusal" a public one. . . . And then he would go away quietly. . . .

He never forgot rising to his feet to address the massed groups of friends, farmers, tenants and dependants who had come thus to do him honor, and by whom he had been presented with an illuminated address in spite of his refusal of all gifts.

First he said a few words, thanking them. There was a hint of emotion in his voice, and the marked foreign accent, which always showed in moments of strong excitement, betrayed his sensibility.

"If it had been necessary," he said, "I should have said something of my own unworthiness, my own unsuitability, to carry on the traditions of my name: of my own unfitness to be the heir of so much that is important and beautiful and wealthy. But it will not be necessary to dwell on that side for reasons which I am now going to explain. But first let me thank you for the honor you have done me, for your kind welcome, and for your reception of me that has been so touching. I think you have made it, perhaps, more difficult than I had imagined it would be for me to tell you what I am obliged to tell you to-day. Perhaps I have made a mistake in not telling you before—perhaps I owed you this confidence. And yet it seemed to me that I ought

to make as public an avowal as possible, and for this reason I shall ask your forgiveness for keeping silence until now."

"What on earth does he mean?" fussed Lord Strode, to Robin. "Did you not help him? What on earth is he going to say? I hope he is not going to make a fool of himself! No one will ever forget it if he does. I ought to have heard him read his speech beforehand!"

His fierce gray brows were savagely knit; he stared angrily at Ambrose. But Lady Strode leaned a little forward and watched him with a delicate flush on her face.

Ambrose was not unmindful of his grandfather's rising impatience, but it did not frighten him now. Robin was near him, and this gave him courage. Robin would understand.

After a moment's pause he proceeded, but his voice, though still clear, was not quite so steady.

"I think you are all aware that there are certain restrictions upon this property. My great-grandfather placed those restrictions for reasons which seemed to him good. He left a clause in his will by which he rendered it impossible for certain persons to inherit any part of his money or of his property."

Now he became suddenly aware of Lady Kathleen's bright flushed face turned towards him, with an expression of painful suspense and solicitude. She seemed to hear him reading again those strangely magic words: "Pass the gates of Luthany—tread the region Elenore." . . .

"The persons he thus excluded from inheriting his property were those of a certain faith—

the Roman Catholic faith. And that is why I shall never inherit Merrywood nor be your friend or your landlord. I am very sorry that this should be so for many reasons. Merrywood has been my home for sixteen years. I should have liked to stay and help my grandfather. But I can never do so. My mother, whom you never knew, was a Catholic, and she had me baptized a Catholic, and she brought me up as one until her death. And quite lately—as soon as I could after coming of age—I returned to the practice of my religion. I did this with full knowledge of all that it meant to me in the way of disinherittance and disability, and with the far more painful knowledge of all that it meant in the way of pain to those dearest to me. And I can make no apology to you except to tell you now that I have always, always wished to return to the practice of my religion, and that I never wilfully surrendered my heritage of faith. I make no other apology because you can see that it was a matter of conscience, and I dared not act otherwise. . . . But there is one thing which in the midst of my present sadness makes me supremely happy, and that is that my place here will be filled—and filled as I could never have hoped to fill it—by my dear friend and cousin Mr. Robin Lumleigh.” He paused and turned to Robin and his voice broke a little. Robin turned scarlet and his mouth trembled. “You all know him, perhaps better indeed than you know me, and I am sure that you all love him. If I leave Merrywood with pain, it is also with joy that I am surrendering what is so dear to me to one

so beloved by me, and by us all. He will do his duty here as I could never have done it; he will help my grandfather as I could never have helped him! He has been for many years my dearest friend and comrade. I wish you to-day Hail and Farewell. I wish I could have remained among you. But if I cannot do so, I can at least give you one who will take my place, and I know you will welcome him as kindly as you have welcomed me."

There was a murmur rather of dismay than of applause, yet there was not wanting in it a note of approbation. The boy's speech had been frank, modest, affecting, even poignant. Slight and graceful, with his small, vivid face lit by those dark and flaming eyes, he stood before them, and had there been any present who had known Yolande Pascoe, they could not have failed to see how she lived again in this young son of hers. Long, long ago the chains that bound him now were forged. Long, long ago, when Maxim Pascoe thoughtlessly and carelessly slipped the ring on his little bride's finger in the small Catholic church of that obscure hill-station in India. Dead hands, that were as powerful and strong as the dead hands of the first Lord Strode, had held him. Dead hands that seemed to have fought an almost macabre conflict for the soul of Ambrose Lumleigh.

Lord Strode was silent; he leaned heavily on Robin's arm. His wife sobbed audibly. Mr. Chenevix rose to break the awkward pause that had supervened.

"We have all heard what Mr. Lumleigh has

had to tell us, and I am sure that we must all have been deeply touched by the way he has performed a very difficult task. We can all—while deploring the reasons—admire him for the courage of his convictions. It is not an easy task to relinquish the responsibilities of our birth. It is not an easy task to fling aside wealth and property for poverty and obscurity, and to be compelled to fail in apparent consideration and gratitude towards those who have brought us up and cared for us. This is what Mr. Lumleigh has had to do. But he has obeyed his conscience and though we cannot think with him—though we may even find it in our hearts to blame him—we must at least admire his courage, his high sense of honor, and his unswerving rectitude. I would ask you to give three cheers for him and three cheers for Mr. Robin Lumleigh to whom we must all extend a very warm welcome, in compliance with his cousin's generous request as well as for his own sake!"

The cheers were given, and there was little doubt as to which was the more popular of the two young men. There was no doubt that Robin was more welcome to them than Ambrose could ever have been. Lord Strode, gray and bowed, rose to speak.

"I did my best," he said, "to save my grandson from those contaminating influences to which as a little child he was subjected. I did my best, because he was my own dear son's son, to save him for Merrywood. But, as you see, he has rebelled; he has shown himself undutiful, careless of responsibility, indifferent to the obligations

of birth, ungrateful to us for all we have done for him. My only consolation is that in his place there will be my dear cousin, Mr. Robin Lumleigh. I present him to you now as my heir, full of confidence that he will never disappoint us." He took Robin's hand and led him a step forward amid renewed and enthusiastic cheering.

Lady Strode insisted upon having a final farewell interview with Ambrose before he left Merrywood Place never to return. But she could not induce her husband to see him. He had shut himself up in his study, a prey to the bitterest disappointment of his life. His only consolation lay in the thought that Robin would succeed him, and that in his hands the traditions of the house would be safe and secure. But his pride had suffered a sharp wound. He knew now that he had been defeated—that he had always been defeated in his conflict with Ambrose. The mother's influence had been too strong. Again he felt that old half-superstitious belief that she, through all those years at Merrywood, had been watching over and guarding her boy, for whom in life she had made such tremendous sacrifices.

Lady Strode was alone in her sitting-room when Ambrose came in. He was dressed for his journey. His face was smiling and radiant; his eyes shone with the light of serene and mystical joys. All that had been ambiguous and enigmatic had gone from his face. All that had perplexed and bewildered him had dropped from him, as a mantle forever doffed. He ran up

to her, knelt by her side. Her hands caressed his hair; she drew him to her.

"Darling," she said, "darling." . . . Her eyes were full of tears.

"You mustn't be sorry for me," he said; "Robin will be son and grandson to you. I could never have filled a big position. Gran-nie, dear—I must go where my heart is, and it isn't that I don't love you better than any one else in the world."

"No, no" . . . she said; "I understand. We couldn't have hoped to keep Yolande's son." She recognized this fact amid indescribable desolation. "So you always remembered, Ambrose? You never forgot?"

He said slowly after her:

"I always remembered. I never forgot." He paused. "It held me always—sometimes it seemed almost like an exterior force . . . it was stronger than anything else. Some day I knew that I should go back."

"Dear boy," she said, "I always knew you wanted something that you hadn't got. I couldn't help seeing that you looked like one starving in the midst of plenty. I used to wonder what it might be, and sometimes I feared the truth. But you have done the only thing you could do. You have not tarnished the honor of your name. I was never so proud of you as when you stood up to-day."

"Oh, I'm glad—I'm glad. Grannie—that you weren't angry." . . .

"Oh, no," she said, "I don't think I should ever be one to keep any one back from what they be-

lieved to be the truth. When you were little I wanted to save you for Merrywood, and I thought, as you were so young, it would be quite easy. Now it breaks my heart to think you must go away—that I must lose you. I have lost two sons, but I do not think they were ever more dear to me than you have been. You were always more gentle and affectionate to me than they were. What shall you do? You have so little—only your mother's money. . . . You can hardly live on that, though you know I will help you all I can."

"Oh, Grannie—I shan't want anything, thank you. I'm going to be a priest if I can. I shall go back to Rome and Father Pacificus will advise me. And I shall write to you." . . .

"Yes," she said, "I shall want your letters, Ambrose. And perhaps some day your grandfather will forgive you enough to let you come back here . . . and see me."

"Yes," he said, "whenever you wish it I will come, if I am allowed. I don't know anything yet except that I am going back. My mother," he hesitated, "made great sacrifices for me. She loved my father, and she renounced this happiness for my sake. . . . I have had the feeling that she was near me through it all."

Lady Strode went downstairs into the hall when the motor came to the door to take him away. Robin was with her, and she leaned upon his arm. Neither of them ever forgot that when Ambrose thus went forth from the heritage he had forfeited, outcast, stripped of all he possessed, and almost penniless, his eyes shone as if

he had seen a vision. At that moment his face was almost as beautiful as Yolande's had been, when she knelt before the Calvary upon the cliff and prayed that Gifford Lumleigh might love her.

THE END

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